

Bliss

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Summary: When Merida finally decides to choose a suitor, her parents don't approve. Her choice certainly wasn't one anybody saw coming.

1. Chapter 1

****Hey everyone! This little idea popped into my head last night and I just had to write it down. It's going to have several more chapters, just so you know. Merida is about 18 here, and because I refuse to believe that Hiccup was only 13 in the movie, he's 17.****

"But I thought ye wanted me to choose a husband!" Merida shouted at her father angrily.

"Of course we do!" her father roared back. "But we thought ye'd choose one a the young lords, not some savage from the edge o' civilization!"

"HE IS NOT A SAVAGE!" Merida cried, rage making her voice shrill. "And I don't ever want to hear you call him that again!" Her eyes caught the light of the torches, blazing as brightly as her fiery hair. Her gaze was so intense that even Fergus shied away.

"Darling, we only want what's best for you," Elinor soothed. She stepped forward and smoothed her daughter's wild curls back from her face. "But honestly, this boy just isn't safe! I mean, his best friend is a dragon, for heaven's sake! It's not right!" Elinor wanted to let Merida make her own decisions, she really did, but the prospect of her only daughter marrying some wayward viking and moving away so he could rule his own kingdom frightened her beyond belief.

"I love him, Mum," Merida said quietly. Her eyes softened and a tear slipped down her cheek. She stepped back so she could see both of her parents. "Isn't that what matters most? Does that mean anything to

you?" She looked from her mother to her father and back again.

Elinor turned back to her husband. Fergus sniffed and quickly wiped away his own tears. He rose from his great throne and walked towards his daughter. Elinor stepped aside so he could take Merida's hands in his own. "We understand, Merida. We just don't want to lose ya'," he said calmly, voicing the same concerns as his wife. "Marrying one of the lords would keep ya' close, marrying the viking will send ya' so far away."

Merida cracked a smile and reached up to swipe a stray tear from her father's face. The burly man sniffed, embarrassed that his daughter had seen him crying. Merida laughed and said, "It's not like I'll never come back, Dad. It's only a day's ride by dragon. He'd never let me get away with not visiting."

Fergus sighed in defeat. He knew there was no arguing with his daughter, especially when it came to her viking boyfriend. He looked to his wife and she silently agreed with him, a simple nod of her head was all that he needed for confirmation. They turned back to their daughter. Merida waited anxiously, her green eyes big and pleading and her hands clasped in front of her chest. Elinor couldn't help but grin, it was so unlike Merida to try to use the puppy-dog face to get her way, but it seemed as if she was out of options. "Very well, then, Merida," the queen said, "you can marry the viking."

Merida squealed and danced around in a circle before wrapping both of her parents in a hug. "Oh, thank you, thank you, thank you!" she giggled, so full of happiness that it was all bubbling out. "I can't wait to tell Hiccup!" she cried. She kissed each of her parents on the cheek and dashed up the stairs to her room.

Fergus and Elinor watched her go. When she had disappeared around the corner and they heard her door slam shut, the Bear King turned to his wife. "Did we do the right thing, Elinor?" he asked. "Should we really be lettin' 'er go?"

Elinor smiled and gave her husband's hand a comforting squeeze. "Of course we did, Fergus. Look how happy she is. Remember when we were that happy to be getting married?" she reassured him.

Fergus chuckled, his booming laugh echoing around the empty throne room. "Aye, you're right. She's blissfully in love. If we hadn't given her permission she would have gone and married him anyway. It's better this way."

oOoOoOoOoOoOo

Up in her room, Merida ran around in circles, giggling like she'd lost her mind. She hadn't felt this emotionally overwhelmed since her mother had transformed back into a human. When her adrenaline had worn off and she realized that she was gasping to breath, she collapsed onto her bed. She lay still for a few minutes, her chest rising and falling as she caught her breath. She reached up and felt her throat for the cord of the necklace Hiccup had given her. She found it and pulled the charm out from under her dress. She held the intricate carving of a Nightfury up so she could see it. She smiled and pressed it to her lips, wishing that Hiccup was there with her.

He'd carved the little charm himself, and the smile he had when he gave it to her had been so big she was afraid it would split his face. In comparison, the little bear charm she'd given him seemed dumb, since it was one that Merida had bought from the witch. Hiccup loved it just the same.

She was anxious to tell him what her parents had said, but she knew he had to deal with his own family. Stoick was probably going to be easier to deal with than Merida's parents had been, but it was still going to take some talking on Hiccup's part.

Merida sighed. She was so excited, she couldn't stand to wait for a wedding. '_Maybe we should just elope,' _she thought. '_It would be so much easier.' _She knew she couldn't though. Elinor had been planning Merida's wedding practically since the day the girl was born. It meant so much to the queen. And at least Merida got to marry someone she loved.

She sat up again and moved to get ready for bed. She wiggled out of her dress and into a nightgown. She pulled the blanket off her bed and dragged it over to the window seat. The night was so cold that the fire blazing in her bedroom hearth was barely slicing through the chill. She wrapped the blanket around herself and curled up against the wall. She rested her forehead against the cool glass and drifted off to sleep. Just before she was gone completely, she whispered, "I'll see you soon, Hiccup."

****So as I said, there'll be more chapters, and I may end up writing a prequel about how they met. TTFN!****

2. Chapter 2

Hiccup stood at the base of the hill leading up to his house, wringing his hands. He stared up at the firelight in the windows. If he looked close enough, he could see his father's shadow moving around inside.

Toothless stared up at his master, intrigued. He knew what Hiccup wanted to talk to his father about tonight, the boy had been blathering on about it all day. What Toothless didn't understand was why his friend was so worried. The dragon rolled his eyes and grunted. He nudged Hiccup's good leg with his snout. The poor boy stumbled and cried out. He carefully righted himself and shot Toothless an exasperated look. The dragon simply nodded up the hill, encouraging Hiccup to go.

Hiccup sighed and his shoulders slumped. "I know, Toothless, I justâ€¦ justâ€¦ what if he says no?" He turned to his best friend and continued. "I mean, he's never even met her! And she's never been here. What if I bring her and she hates it, or she misses her family too much?"

Toothless gave Hiccup a look of disbelief. The boy sighed again and rubbed his hand over his eyes. "Alright, alright, I'm going," he groaned. He trudged his way up the hill, grateful for once that his prosthetic leg was slowing him down. He got to the door, took a deep breath, and shoved it open. "Hi, Dad," he called out, hoping that he didn't sound as nervous as he felt. He stood rooted to the spot in the doorway. Toothless grunted and shoved his way past. Hiccup took

the dragon's cue and stepped in, shutting the door behind him.

"Hello, son," Stoick answered. Toothless bounded across the room to the oversized man, wrapping around him like a domesticated tabby cat and making him laugh. Hiccup managed to crack a smile at his father and his dragon while he hung up Toothless' saddle. He wandered across the room and sat down at the table across from where Stoick was fending off an affectionate Night Fury.

"Sooo, Dad," Hiccup began, not really sure how he should start the conversation. "There's something I need to talk to you about."

"Just a moment, Hiccup," Stoick replied, still trying to wrestle Toothless away. "Go eat yer fish," he laughed, shoving the dragon away. He turned back to his son and said, "What did you want to talk about, son?"

"Do you remember when I told you about that girl who lives in Scotland that I kind of have a crush on?" Hiccup replied cautiously.

"Mary Beth, right?" Stoick said. "What about her?" He took a swig from the tankard sitting on the table in front of him, seemingly oblivious to how nervous Hiccup was.

"Merida," Hiccup corrected, "but you were close. Well, what I wanted to talk to you about was, it's not so much a crush that I have on her anymore." He wrung his hands beneath the table, eyes trained on the wall behind Stoick's head.

"Where are you going with this, Hiccup?" Stoick sighed, taking another long drink from his mug.

"Iâ€¦ I asked her to marry me, Dad."

Stoick choked on his ale, coughing it up and spitting it across the table and onto his son. He spluttered, trying desperately to breathe before looking back up at Hiccup. "You _what_?" he panted. "Howâ€¦ whenâ€¦ whatâ€¦ why?"

"I believe the answer to all of those questions is, _because I love her_," Hiccup spat back. "And may I just say, thank you not only for that lovely face full of ale, but for the complete faith in my decisions." He offered his father a sarcastic smile as he wiped his face with his sleeve.

"Oh come off it, Hiccup," Stoick seethed. "How could you even think this was a good idea? Couldn't you have just fallen in love with a viking girl?"

"I tried that, Dad," Hiccup shouted. "You know how things ended with Astrid."

"Astrid isn't the only girl on the island Hiccup! What about that Thorston girl, she seems nice enough."

"Yeah, sure Ruffnut's pretty nice, but she's a _lunatic_. Merida is brave and strong and sweet, and equally important: she's _sane_."

"Didn't you say she was a princess? She'd have to stay in her kingdom to rule there wouldn't she?" Stoick pointed out in the hope that he had stumped his son.

"She said she wanted to come live here, on Berk," Hiccup countered. "She has three little brothers that can take the throne when they're older."

"But what aboutâ€¦| what aboutâ€¦| alright I'm out of butts. I still don't think this is a good idea though!" Stoick barked.

"Dad, do you remember how much you loved mom?" Hiccup asked, trying a different approach.

"What does that have to do with your Scottish girlfriend?" Soick replied.

"Just answer the question, Dad," Hiccup sighed.

"Of course. Your mother meant the world to me, but I still don't see what that has to do withâ€¦|" he trailed off, seeing the look Hiccup was giving him. He had one slightly soggy eyebrow raised as if to say 'You really don't see where I'm going with this?' "Ooooh, I've got you now." Stoick said with a nod. Hiccup smiled and rolled his eyes. "You're sure about this, Hiccup?"

"Yes, Dad," Hiccup said. "I love her."

"All right then." Stoick reached across and patted Hiccup on the shoulder.

"Yes!" Hiccup cried. He leapt out of his seat and scrambled across the table to hug his dad. "Thanks, Dad!" He released Stoick and ran over to Toothless. "See, buddy, I told you he would say yes! I can't believe you doubted me!" Toothless grunted indignantly, but didn't have the heart to ruin Hiccup's good mood.

"You're welcome, son," Stoick said. "Now off to bed. I suspect you'll be wanting to go see her tomorrow."

"Yeah!" Hiccup exclaimed. "Come on, Toothless." He bounded up the stairs two at a time with Toothless on his heels.

Once Hiccup was undressed and ready for bed, he found he couldn't sleep. He turned to look out the window, fingering the amulet that hung around his neck. It was a little carving of a bear that Merida had given him. "I'll be there soon," he whispered into the darkness. "Everything will be perfect."

Okay, so apparently you guys absolutely love this stuff. Thanks! This story has quickly rocketed to one of the most popular I've written. I have a couple other things I'm working on, not to mention school, so it might be a bit slow, but I promise I won't abandon you guys. Thanks for reading. TTFN!

3. Chapter 3

The next morning, Hiccup was greeted by a blinding ray of sunlight

and a dragon's snout jabbing him in the ribs.

"Gaaah! Toothless! What do you want?" Hiccup groaned. He laid his left arm over his eyes and used his right to push Toothless away. The dragon persisted however. He jumped up on the bed, took Hiccup's amulet in his mouth and tugged on it. "Hey, Toothless, stop! Merida gave that to me!" Hiccup scolded, still not sitting up. He yanked the charm back and laid it against his chest.

"Merida!" Hiccup exclaimed. He threw back the covers and scrambled out of bed. He yanked open his dresser drawers and grabbed the first shirt he could find, wiggling into it. He did the same with his pants and his boot. He ran to the stairs and hopped down on his good foot. He'd found that that was the best way to do it.

"Morning, Dad!" he shouted. Stoick was sitting at the table eating a bowl of porridge and going over his checklist for the day.

"Mornin', Hiccup," he replied. "I was wondering when you would be up."

"Yeah, Toothless just had to wake me," Hiccup grumbled. He served himself a bowl of porridge and plopped down across from his father. He snatched the spoon that was sitting there for him and started shoveling the gloopy substance into his mouth without really tasting it.

"Slow down, son!" Stoick chuckled, taking the boy's spoon away. Hiccup looked up at him, startled. "You've gotta remember to breathe, boy. I know you're excited to go see your girlfriend, but ya won't be much good ta her if ya choke to death on yer breakfast."

Hiccup blushed and gingerly took back the spoon. He plunged it into the bowl again and proceeded to eat at a more sensible rate. "Sorry," he mumbled through a mouthful. When he'd finished his meal a few minutes later, he tossed the bowl and spoon in the bin with the other dirty dishes and bolted to the door. "See you later, Dad," he called back. "Or you know, tomorrow. Either way I'll see you." He took Toothless' saddle and the harness off of their hook by the door and ran out, Night Fury on his heels.

Hiccup sprinted through town at top speed, making his way towards the docks. Not many people were out yet, but there were a few milling about.

"Hiccup, 'ey!" a familiar voice shouted after him. Hiccup screeched to a stop so suddenly that Toothless didn't have time to slow down. Dragon plowed into rider and they both went tumbling down. "Careful there, boy," the voice chuckled. A meaty hand reached down and yanked the boy to his feet.

"Thanks, Gobber," Hiccup replied. He brushed himself off and then glanced down to make sure Toothless was unhurt.

"So, I hear that congratulations are in order," Gobber continued, patting Hiccup on the back.

"Yeeaah," Hiccup replied with a blush. "You talked to Dad?"

"O course I did," the man bellowed. "We're best friends! There isn't

nothin' yer father don't tell ol' Gobber."

Hiccup laughed. "I'm actually off to see her now," Hiccup said, gesturing to the saddle tucked under his arm.

"Best be on yer way then. When do you plan on bringin' the lady here to meet us?"

Hiccup froze. He actually hadn't thought about that. He'd met Merida's parents, but she'd never been to Berk. "I don't know, actually," he admitted. "Maybe I'll bring her when I come home this time."

"Good," Gobber nodded. "Now off with ya. It's not polite to keep a lady waiting."

"Right. See you later!" Hiccup took off again, step-hopping his way down the hill with Toothless keeping a close eye on him to make sure he didn't fall.

The pair got down to the shore and Hiccup started strapping Toothless' saddle on and fastening himself into his harness. He was interrupted however when a new voice said, "Hiccup?" from behind him.

Hiccup and Toothless sighed in unison. They just wanted to get going. Toothless couldn't wait to take to the sky, Hiccup couldn't wait to see his princess again. But, always the polite person, he turned around to greet the owner of the voice.

"Good morning, Astrid." He plastered a smile on his face. Of all people, it ****had ****to be her.

"Hey. What're you doing? You're never up this early," she asked.

Hiccup blushed slightly and rubbed his neck. "I'm kind of on my way somewhere. What about you? What're you doing this morning?"

"Ruffnut and I were going to go forâ€¦" she began, but got cut off by a roar from the ledge above them.

"Hey, Astrid where'd you go?" another feminine voice called down. Both heads of a Zippleback appeared over the ledge, but only one head was occupied. Ruffnut leaned over so she could see down to the water's edge. "Oh hey, Hiccup. Hang on, I'll be right down." She urged her dragon off of the ledge, and it hovered down to Hiccup and Astrid. She swung off of its neck and strolled over to her friends. "Astrid and I were gonna go for a ride. Wanna come with?"

"Actually, I was on my way out for a couple days," Hiccup replied. One of the Zippleback's heads slithered over to him and he gave it a quick pat.

"Sweet. Where ya goin'?" Ruffnut asked.

"Scotland, actually," Hiccup answered.

"Oooo, going to see the girlfriend," Ruffnut teased, elbowing Hiccup in the ribs.

Before he thought about what he was saying, Hiccup blurted, "FiancÃ©, actually."

"What?!" Ruffnut and Astrid screeched together.

"What do you mean 'fiancÃ©'?" Astrid exclaimed.

"You're getting married to the Scot? No way! That is wicked! I've gotta go tell everyone!" Ruffnut swung herself back up onto the Zippleback and turned it towards Astrid. "You comin'?" she called.

"Go ahead, I'll catch up," Astrid replied, waving her off. She crossed her arms and glared at Hiccup as the other girl took off. Once they were gone, Astrid burst. "What do you think you're doing?" she shouted. "You're going to marry the Scottish princess and run off to go rule her kingdom? How could you? I was perfectly okay with the fact that things didn't work out between us, but couldn't you have married another girl from the tribe? You're such an _idiot_!"

"Stop it, Astrid!" Hiccup shouted back. "Yes, I'm going to marry Merida, and we're going to live here so I can be chief! You want to know why? Because I love her! I don't think you can possibly understand that, because you might actually be incapable of feeling love! All you care about is impressing people and being the best, and if you're not, then you have to make it so you are! _That's _why you didn't like me spending so much time with Toothless. You were afraid that I would be better than you at something! You might be faster and stronger than me, Astrid, but I will _always _be the better dragon rider. And there is nothing that will ever change that!"

Astrid stood there looking shocked. She gaped at Hiccup, surprised that such a small body could even hold all that anger.

"Goodbye, Astrid," Hiccup said. He signaled Toothless over and mounted. Without so much as a backward glance, he clicked Toothless' tailfin into position and took off into the sky.

* * *

><p>Merida rode through the trees firing at her hidden targets. The sun was setting, and it was at least her fifteenth go at it that day, but she was restless. She had been watching the skies all day waiting for Hiccup. She'd been making Angus run their course forever, and the poor horse was exhausted. After she'd finished the loop again, she dismounted and patted Angus' muzzle. "All right, take a break," she said sadly.<p>

Angus whinnied gratefully and plopped down on his rump, unable to stand any longer. Merida giggled at the beast and started to wander back along the trail collecting her arrows.

The red-headed girl froze when she heard a faint sound. It was high-pitched and far off, but she was almost sure that she'd heard it. She listened closer, tuning out all the natural sounds of the forest. There it was again! She dashed out to where she could see up between the tree tops. She turned her face towards the crimson sky and squinted into the fading sunlight. "Come on, come on. I'd know that cry anywhere. Come on," she muttered.

Then it happened. A black streak. There and gone so fast that she would have missed it if she hadn't been waiting for exactly that. Merida whooped for joy and ran back to where she had left Angus, foolishly trying to shove her arrows into the quiver while it was bouncing on her hip.

"Let's go Angus, they're headed toward the river!" she exclaimed. The horse just gave her a questioning look and laid down all the way. "Fine! I'll go by myself." She whipped her bow and quiver off and stuck them in the crook of the tree behind Angus, planning on coming back for them later. She took off running in the direction the black streak had gone.

Merida burst through the tree line into a clearing on the river bank. The first thing she noticed was the dark mass of scales and muscles leaping around in the water in a failed attempt to catch dinner. The second thing she noticed was the boy with the metal leg slipping around on the wet rocks.

"Hiccup!" Merida cried.

The boy spun around, his damp hair clinging to his forehead. He spotted her standing by the trees and a smile split his thin face.

Merida ran from the trees and straight for him. She leapt into his arms. The combination of her force and the lack of friction the rocks were providing toppled him over backwards, but Toothless was there to catch them before they hit the water.

Blushing, Merida stood and pulled Hiccup back up so he was standing. They stepped out of the water and onto the grass so as not to fall again. Once she was sure that Hiccup was steady on his foot, she flung herself into his arms again. She wrapped her arms tight around his neck and buried her face in his shoulder.

Hiccup's arms found their natural place around her waist with ease. He pressed his nose into her wild hair and took a deep breath. He loved the smell of her. She smelled like fresh air and trees and adventure. He knew that it didn't make any sense, but that's the only way he knew how to describe it.

"I missed you," he said into her hair.

She pulled away so they were arms' length away from each other and gave him a look. "What was that?"

"I said 'I missed you,'" he explained.

Merida laughed and hugged him again. "I missed ya, too, ya filthy viking."

Hiccup smiled. It felt so right to be with her again. He could feel his amulet where the pressure of her against him was pushing it into his chest. And hanging next to it on the cord, he could feel the cool surface of the other thing he'd strung on there that morning.

Hiccup stepped away from her and took her hand, leading her back to where Toothless was still trying unsuccessfully to catch a fish to

eat. "So," he said, "did you talk to your parents?"

"Of course," she replied. She let go of his hand to wade into the shallow water. She watched the flow for a minute, and then lunged forward and came up with a wiggling fish clutched between her hands. "Here ya go, Toothless." She tossed the fish to the dragon, who swallowed it in one gulp.

Hiccup chose to stay where the ground was dry and he had a better chance of staying upright. "Aaaand?" he prompted, getting nervous.

"Aaaand," Merida mocked with a grin, "they said yes! Of course they said yes, ya dummy!" She launched herself at him once again. She leaned back so she could see him and said, "What about yer dad? What did he say?"

Hiccup simply nodded, so full of emotion that he didn't trust himself to speak.

Merida giggled and bounced away from him to perform her signature happy dance. "We're going to get married, Hiccup!" she giggled. She twirled into the river and wrapped her arms around Toothless' neck. "We're getting married, Toothless!" She bolted straight again. "I've got to tell Angus!" She sloshed out of the stream and started to run back the way she'd come, but Hiccup sprang forward and caught her by the arm.

Hiccup pulled the giddy ginger to his chest and wrapped his arms around her to keep her still. "You can tell him later," he said with a loving smile. Merida smiled back, happy tears welling in her eyes. Her arms snapped up and her fingers tangled in Hiccup's shaggy brown hair. She pulled his face down towards hers and kissed him.

When the annoying requirement of breathing forced them to separate, Hiccup tugged his necklace out from under his shirt and slipped it off. He untied the knot and took the second object off of the cord.

"Now that we're officially engaged," he said, "do you think that maybe you could wear this?" He opened his hand and held it out to her. Sitting in his palm was a simple silver ring. When he'd first proposed, she'd of course said yes, but was worried that maybe if she wore the ring before she'd asked her parents' permission, things would be a bit harder.

Hiccup had forged the ring himself, something he'd barely done at all since the opening of the dragon academy. He'd molded the silver into a ring and pressed several tiny diamonds into the metal while it was still warm and soft. He was well aware that there were better ways to do it, but he was hoping that the fact that he had made it himself would count for something.

Merida took a step back and grinned mischievously. "I dunno," she whispered. "Why don't you ask me again?"

Hiccup smiled and got down on his good knee. Toothless paused in his pursuit of food to look up at the scene unfolding before him. "Princess Merida," Hiccup said, "will you marry me?" He held the ring out to her.

"Of course I will, ya dimwit!" Merida cried. She snatched the ring from him with a teasing smile and slipped it onto her left hand ring finger. "I still can't believe you made it," she sighed as Hiccup staggered back to his feet.

"Anything for my princess," he shrugged. Merida shot him a look. She acted like she didn't like when he referred to her as "princess," but in truth she loved when he said it.

"Thank you," she said. She reached up and touched his cheek.

Hiccup leaned down and gently kissed her forehead. "I love you, Merida," he said quietly.

Merida stood on her toes and gave him a quick peck on the lips. "I love you, too, Hiccup." They kissed again. When Merida dropped away after a moment she said, "My, when'd it get this dark?" The pair looked around and realized that they were standing there in the moonlight, the sun having completely set.

"We'd better head back," Hiccup said. He took her hand and turned towards the trees. "I don't want your parents to rethink their decision. We'll go get Angus though. Come on, Toothless."

Toothless waded out of the water and walked behind the couple as they strolled off, Merida's bright hair the last thing to disappear into the darkness.

****Okay, longer chapter. I've been **dying** to write about them interacting. I was so excited to do this chapter and I can't wait to continue.****

****Now, if you are a deep and passionate Astrid fan, and would like to flame me for what I wrote about her, I ask that you simply save yourself some time and write "I don't like what you did with Astrid" instead of coming up with clever insults. If no one was offended by how I portrayed Astrid, that's even better! I'd just hate for you to waste your valuable time writing a mean review.****

4. Chapter 4

Merida woke later than usual the next morning. She'd been up late with her mother and Hiccup. Well, her father had been there, too, but he was asleep through most of it. As soon as Merida and Hiccup had arrived back at the castle they'd been swarmed by her family. Her brothers had quickly latched onto Hiccup's hands and good leg, giggling happily and refusing to let go. Fergus had given the poor boy the mandatory, "You'd better take good care of my daughter." Elinor had simply given the boy a hug and said, "Welcome to the family."

Soon after though, things started to go bad. Merida should have seen it coming, but she'd been temporarily blinded by her bliss. But of course, Elinor had jumped directly into wedding planner mode.

Hamish, Hubert, and Harris, immediately detached themselves from Hiccup and ran off. Fergus attempted to do the same, but Elinor simply

grabbed him by the ear and marched over to the long table in the middle of the room.

Elinor reasoned that the wedding should be held in DunBroch, because not only did Merida's family have to invite the other three clans, but it was much easier for the Vikings to travel because they had dragons.

The queen figured that for the wedding, Hiccup could wear traditional Viking garb. Merida, on the other hand would wear a dress specifically made for the occasion. Elinor summoned a maid who fetched a piece of paper from the queen's chambers. Elinor carefully unfolded it and spread it out on the table. It displayed a carefully drawn design of a wedding dress.

"What's that?" Merida muttered, peering at a tiny bit of writing in the bottom corner. She raised herself up and squinted at it, letting out a gasp. "That's a date! You've had this drawn up since I was two!" She gaped at her mother, who simply smoothed a wrinkle in the paper.

"I just wanted to be prepared, Merida."

Merida groaned dramatically and slumped in her chair. Hiccup rolled his eyes with a smile and took her hand under the table, making her blush.

Once the torture was over for the night, Merida trudged up to her room, shoulders hunched forward and head hanging low.

"Are you alright?" Hiccup asked as she was opening her bedroom door. She felt his fingers wrap around her thin arm and she sighed. Merida turned around to her fiancé's worried face.

"I'm fine," she said, giving what she hoped was a reassuring smile. "It's just that she's only going to get worse." She gestured hopelessly towards the staircase. "And I'm tired of it already."

Hiccup smiled at her. His hand slipped down her arm to her hand and their fingers twined together. "I guess now would be a pretty good time to mention that my dad wants me to bring you to Berk."

Merida's eyes widened. "That would be perfect!" she cried. "I would finally get to see Berk and I'd get to get away for a while!" She laughed, leaping forward to wrap her arms around Hiccup's neck.

Hiccup smiled and hugged her back. "All right. Get to bed then, it's an all-day flight to Berk." He kissed her curly hair, opened the door to hold it for her. "Good night, Merida."

"Good night, Hiccup," she replied. She raised herself up to peck him on the lips as she passed, making him blush.

So now it was morning, and Merida was getting dressed. She put on her usual green dress and started down the hall towards the stairs. At the top of the staircase, she could hear voices down in the great hall.

Merida froze when she realized who the voices belonged to. "Oooh,

no," she sighed. She hurried down the stairs.

Just as she'd suspected, there were visitors in the hall. At the head of the table, her mother, father, and brothers were sitting with the three lords, Macintosh, Dingwall, and McGuffin. At the other end, her poor Hiccup was being forced to breakfast with the younger lords.

Young Macintosh was standing on the bench with one foot on the table, slashing his arm through the air as if he had a sword. McGuffin was listening with rapt attention, while Dingwall just looked bored out of his wits. Well, what wits he had, anyway. Hiccup had his back to Merida, but she could just imagine how uncomfortable he was.

Knowing her parents, they'd introduced Hiccup as Merida's "friend" so as not to have a brawl over breakfast. And knowing Hiccup, he'd been too polite to correct them.

Elinor looked up from her eggs to see Merida standing at the bottom of the steps. "Good morning dear," she called out. All talking ceased. Macintosh halted his re-enactment with his arm still raised. Hiccup swiveled to look at her and she could see his face relax in relief. "Come say hello," Elinor beckoned. She waved Merida over with her fork.

"Good morning, Mum," Merida said, bending to kiss her mother's cheek. "Daddy." She kissed him, too, and then turned to the lords. "It's nice to see you again, gentlemen."

"Princess," they said together, bowing their heads.

Merida nodded back and hurried down the table. She approached the younger lords on the side opposite Hiccup. "Hello, boys," she greeted. She gave them her usual cordial smile and sidestepped Wee Dingwall's attempt to kiss her hand. Young Macintosh leapt down from the table to block her path.

"M'lady," he said, giving a deep bow. "What a pleasure it must be to be in my presence."

Merida winced at his arrogance. "Of course, Dallan," she said, patting him on the shoulder before she continued on.

Young McGuffin was sitting at the foot of the table, smiling timidly. "Hello, Riley," she said, giving him a genuine smile of her own. He was by far the nicest out of the boys, and Merida's favorite. If she hadn't met Hiccup and it had come instead to choosing one of the young lords she probably would have chosen him.

"Mornin'," he said, easily understood for once.

Merida walked around behind him and over to Hiccup. They didn't greet each other, only smiled. "I am so sorry," Merida whispered as she passed. She trailed her hand along his shoulders, brushing the back of his neck with her fingertips. She took a seat next to him, and the boy had enough sense not to hold her hand. Someone would have noticed.

"I didn't know you boys were coming for a visit," Merida said.

"Our messenger was waylaid," Dallan said as he reclaimed his seat.

"I see," she said. A servant came and set a plate in front of her. She picked up the fork and poked at the food but couldn't bring herself to eat it.

"You okay?" Hiccup murmured, looking over at her.

Merida nodded so as not to raise suspicion, but Hiccup could tell she was lying. He didn't say anything though.

"Merida," Elinor called down the table. "Isn't there something you need to tell us."

"Actually, Mother, I think it would be better if you delivered the news," Merida said. '_Please, please don't make me do this.' _she thought, hoping her mother could read her expression.

Elinor sighed and delicately set down the fork. "Very well. Gentlemen," everyone at the table had their eyes on her.

Hiccup took Merida's hand under the table. '_Here it comes' _she thought.

"My daughter has chosen a young man to be her husband and is ready for marriage," Elinor said.

'_Well, I didn't expect it ta come quite like that,' _Merida thought, surprised. She and Hiccup looked at each other. He was obviously equally surprised.

"What now?" Hiccup mouthed. Merida shrugged and turned back to the table to find that everyone was looking at her.

"It would be appropriate for you to tell them who you've chosen," Elinor urged. She gave Merida a cold look that clearly meant that she should do as she was told.

"Oh." Merida looked at the young lords, who all smiled back expectantly. "Well, I chose Hiccup," she said, with sideways nod at him. He raised one hand to wave and gave a half smile.

The entire room was as silent as if everyone had dropped dead. There wasn't even any noise coming from outside. Everyone just stared at Merida and Hiccup, who stared right back at them. They were squeezing each other's hands so tightly that neither of them had any blood going to their fingers.

"Guys?" Merida said cautiously.

That did it. Wee Dingwall let out a barbaric roar and leapt across the table, straight for Hiccup. He slammed into Hiccup and they both fell backwards over the bench, toppling it and taking Merida with them.

"Neason, stop!" Merida shouted. She scrambled across the floor to try and pry the crazed boy off of her fiancÃ©.

Hiccup was desperately trying to shove Neason away, but even though

the Scot was smaller, he had gone completely berserk and was clawing savagely at Hiccup's face and neck, trying to kill him.

There was a screech, and suddenly Neason was gone and the door to the great hall was wide open.

"Toothless, no!" Hiccup cried, but he couldn't get up. His drink had spilled in the commotion and his prosthetic couldn't find any purchase on the wet stones.

Toothless had Neason pinned under his front paws and was growling at him, fire already building in his throat. Neason was sobbing like a child, begging for someone to help him. The other lords already had their weapons drawn and were cautiously advancing on the dragon.

"Don't!" Merida warned. She leapt away from Hiccup, who was no longer the primary concern. She stood between Toothless and the lords, her arms spread. "You'll only make it worse." She turned to Toothless and gently put her hand on his head. "Toothless," she whispered soothingly. "It's alright big guy. Hiccup is alright, look."

Toothless turned to look at his master. Fergus had helped the boy up and he was now leaning against the table. There was a scratch from his left temple down to his chin and it was bleeding slightly but other than that he was unharmed.

"See," Merida said. She stroked Toothless' head. "Nothing to worry about. Now why don't you let our friend Neason go. He won't be a threat anymore. I think you've scared him."

Neason whimpered and nodded rapidly. He opened his mouth to speak, but Merida silenced him with a harsh glare.

"Come on, bud," Hiccup said. He held his hand out to Toothless. "I'm fine. Just let him go."

Slowly, Toothless backed away. She slithered over to Hiccup and stood protectively at his side.

Merida helped Neason to his feet. "Are you alright?" she asked. He just shrieked and ran over to his father. The others gaped, their eyes shifting from Merida to Hiccup and Toothless and back again. "I'm-I'm sorry," Merida said. No one responded.

"Merida!" Hiccup said, taking a step towards her. She held out her hand to stop him.

"Mum, Dad, I'm going to Berk with Hiccup. I think that's what's best. I'll be back in a few days." She turned to the lords. "I am so sorry that you wasted your time on me," she said. "And I'm sorry you almost got hurt, Neason." She walked over to Hiccup. She stood on her tip-toes and whispered, "Go wait for me in the forest, where we met last night."

"Alright," he whispered back. He gave her a one armed hug and then turned and walked out, Toothless on his heels.

Merida left the great hall without a word.

She found her brothers at the top of the stairs, quivering with fear. Of course they'd met Toothless before, even touched him, but they'd never seen him attack.

"It's alright, boys," Merida reassured them. "Toothless was just worried about Hiccup." She got down on her knees and wrapped all three of them in her arms. "I'm going away for a while. Only a few days. You be good for Mummy and Dad while I'm gone."

"You're coming back to us right, Merida?" Hamish said, surprising her. The triplets hardly ever spoke. They preferred to express what they were thinking through their actions.

"Of course," she said. "But you know that once Hiccup and I are married I'll have to go live on Berk."

Hubert spoke then. "You'll come visit though, won't you?"

"Yes, but I won't always be around to keep you from getting in trouble. You might have to grow up a little bit. Be more responsible. Do you think you can do that for me?" She smiled hopefully at them.

Harris nodded with tears in his eyes. "Just promise you won't forget about us."

Merida started crying, too. "I could never forget about you. We're family, and we'll always be there for each other, no matter how far apart we are."

All three boys wrapped their arms around her. She hugged them back and sniffed away her tears. "Alright," she declared, pulling away. "Do you want to help me pack?"

The triplets nodded, their brief period of speech over. They ran down the hall towards her room, tripping and shoving each other as they went.

Merida laughed as she rose and followed them. "That's my boys."

oOoOoOoOoOoOo

When she was done packing and had said goodbye to her brothers, Merida headed back down to the great hall to leave. She had her bow across her chest and a quiver full of arrows hanging from her belt. She carried a sack with some clothes in it, just a few simple dresses and underclothes. Unfortunately, her mother was waiting for her.

Elinor was standing at the head of the table, her arms crossed over her chest. Merida flinched under her cold glare, knowing that there was no way she could escape.

Merida walked up to her mother and dropped her bag at her feet.

"I don't want you going to Berk. Not on that beast."

"It was an accident, Mum," Merida replied calmly. "He was just trying

to protect Hiccup."

"He nearly killed Neason!" Elinor cried.

"Neason shouldn't 've attacked Hiccup!" Merida shouted back.

"Toothless would never hurt me. Did you see the way he calmed down when I was talking to him? He trusts me, Mum."

Elinor sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose. "He's a wild animal, Merida. They can't be controlled."

"Toothless is a good dragon," Merida said. "And besides, Hiccup would never let him hurt me. Never."

Elinor stared hard at her. Merida squared her shoulders and stared right back.

"Alright," Elinor sighed. "Be back by the end of the week." She spread her arms for a hug and Merida obliged. "Your father is down at the docks trying to smooth things over with the lords. You should say goodbye."

Merida nodded and kissed her mother's cheek. "Alright. I love you, Mum. I'll be back." She picked up her bag and left, waving as she went.

Merida hurried out of the castle and towards the docks. She didn't want to keep Hiccup waiting too long. She was almost at the pier when she literally ran into her father.

"Oi!" he cried. "Sorry, dear."

"I- I just wanted to come say goodbye. I'll be home by the end of the week," Merida said.

Fergus looked down at his daughter. Her fiery hair was in a cloud around her face, making her blue eyes pop. "Please be careful, sweetheart." He pulled her to him, crushing her against his chest.

"I love you, Dad," she choked, unable to breathe with her face pressed into her father's chest.

"I love you, too." He released her and gave her shoulder a squeeze with his meaty hand. "Do you want me to walk ya to the forest edge?"

"Nah, I'll be alright. Thanks though, Dad." She smiled and blew a kiss, then was on her way again.

Merida walked to the tree line, then looked over her shoulder to make sure no one was watching before she took off at full speed. She crashed through the underbrush, hoping that no wild animals were out looking for lunch. Once she tripped and her sleeve snagged on a branch as she went down. The fabric tore and she cursed, but got right back up and started running again.

She stumbled into the clearing in much the same manner she had the night before. Hiccup was leaning against a tree and watching Toothless catching fish after fish, fueling up for the flight back to

Berk. Hiccup turned when she crashed through the bushes and fell to her knees, cursing again. He dashed over and helped her to her feet.

"I'm so sorry for what happened back there," he said.

"No, I'm sorry Neason was trying ta kill you. He deserved that. Trust me," Merida said. She pushed her curls out of her face and smiled at him. "And I bet it was fun. Right, Toothless?" she called, looking past Hiccup.

Toothless swallowed a fish and grunted his agreement.

"Alright," Hiccup assented. He pulled Merida in for a hug and felt something hot and sticky on her arm. "You're bleeding!" he cried.

"Huh?" Merida looked down at the tear in her sleeve and found that there was indeed a deep gash there. She felt lightheaded at the sight. Merida really hated blood, especially her own. She swayed a little bit and found herself leaning heavily on Hiccup. "It's n-nothing," she stammered, still unable to look without feeling faint. "Don't worry about it."

"No way," Hiccup said, already leading her towards a rock by the water. "That definitely is not okay." He sat her down on the rock. Toothless came over and was poking at her arm but Hiccup shoved him away. "Take your bow off," he ordered. Merida's hand instinctively moved up to clutch it protectively. "Merida, please," he begged and she handed it over. He took it, her bag, and unclipped her quiver from her belt and set them all on the ground next to her.

"There's a handkerchief in me bag," Merida offered.

Hiccup opened her bag and found the hanky. He dipped it in the crystal clear water of the stream. He knelt on the ground in front of Merida and gingerly wiped away the blood around the wound.

"Yer bleedin', too," Merida said softly. She drew her finger down the scrape on his cheek.

"It's not really bleeding anymore," Hiccup corrected, eyes still trained on her arm. "I wiped it off when I got here. It's just healing now." Merida nodded understanding.

"There," Hiccup said a moment later. "All clean." He swished the handkerchief in the water to rinse the blood out. When it was white again he set it on the rock next to her. Then he reached up with his right hand and grabbed his left sleeve at the shoulder. He yanked hard and the fabric ripped apart.

"Hiccup!" Merida exclaimed.

"Calm down," he said with a small smile. "I'll be fine. You're the one with the bloody gash in your arm." He ripped his sleeve into one long strip and wrapped it tightly around her arm, tying it into place. "Better?" Hiccup asked her.

"Much, thanks," she replied. She ducked her head and blushed. She was embarrassed that he had to take care of her just because blood made

her a little weak in the knees.

He raised himself up and kissed the tip of her nose. "Good," he smiled. She only blushed redder. He laughed and swept her up in his arms. He had one arm behind her shoulders and the other under her knees.

Merida screamed. "Hiccup! What're you doin'?"

"I am saving a damsel in distress."

Merida punched his shoulder. "I am not a damsel in distress," she informed him. "And I don't need ta be saved. I'm just not fond of blood." She wrapped her arms around his neck though, because she didn't want him to put her down.

"I know, I was just teasing," he laughed. He kissed her on the lips, clutching her close. "I just like to see you blush."

That, of course, made her blush. To distract Hiccup from that fact, she kissed him again.

"Now we match," she said, patting his scarlet cheek.

"Alright, alright," he sighed. He gently set her on her feet and called Toothless over. Her unclipped his harness from the saddle and wriggled into it.

"You ready?" he asked.

She slipped her bow back over her head, her quiver to her belt, and picked up her bag. "Let's go."

Hiccup jumped up on to Toothless' back and hooked himself in. He held his hand out to Merida and pulled her up behind him. She wrapped her arms around his waist and held on as tight as she could.

"You don't have to hold on so tight," he said. "We'd never let you fall."

"I know," Merida said. She rested her chin on his shoulder and kissed his cheek.

"Okay then," he clicked his foot into the pedal and opened the tail fin. "Let's go then Toothless."

oOoOoOoOoOoOo

Berk came into view well after midnight. The torches were lit in the streets and a few windows, but there was no movement. Still, the view from the back of a dragon was one of a kind.

"Merida, look," Hiccup said, to no response. He glanced over to find that she was asleep with her head on his shoulder. "Merida, wake up," he said, shaking his shoulder a bit to rouse her.

"Huh?" Merida gasped. Her head snapped up and she wiped at the corner of her mouth. "What is it?"

"Look, we're here."

Merida rubbed the sleep from her eyes and gazed down at the firelight sparkling off of the water.

"Oh myâ€¦" she gasped. "Hiccup, this is amazing." She pushed up on his shoulders to stand on her knees.

"Be careful," he warned but she shushed him.

She let out a sigh. "This is beautiful."

"I know," Hiccup agreed. "Take it in while you can. It's not so nice up close."

Toothless spiraled slowly towards the ground. He touched down in the square and trotted a few steps to slow down. Hiccup unhooked his harness from the saddle and slipped down. He held his arms out to Merida and she hopped down.

"Ready to meet my dad?" Hiccup asked.

"Can't wait," Merida grinned.

Hiccup took her bag from her and led her up the hill. They got to the door and all three stood staring at the line of light beneath it.

Merida took Hiccup's hand. "Well open the door," she whispered, nodding to said door."

Hiccup took a deep breath and pushed it open. He stepped inside, but held his hand out to Merida, signaling that she should stay where he was. "Hey, Dad," he said.

Stoick looked up from the paper he was reading. An overjoyed smile split his face. "Hiccup, yer home!" he cried. He rose from his seat.

"Yeah, and there's someone I want you to meet." He turned and motioned out the door.

Merida stepped across the threshold, Hiccup's hand clutched tightly in hers. "Hello, sir."

Stoick took in the girl. Her hair was all blown straight back from flying so long and it was a shade of red that you just couldn't find on Berk. Her arm was bandaged with Hiccup's sleeve. She had a bow across her chest and a quiver at her hip.

Stoick walked across the room and over to Merida. He took one of her dainty hands between his giant ones. "It's a pleasure to finally meet you, Merida."

****Alright, funny author's note. My mom bought the Avengers at the store and she got a box of popcorn and a plastic cup with it. She got one with Iron Man for my brother and one with Merida for me. It is a literal Meri-cup. Get it? Like Mericcup? I laughed so hard it was unbelievable and she didn't even know why.****

****I'm sorry this took so long. School was taking over and then my**

computer spazzed and Microsoft Word wouldn't open things. I just got it fixed. I hope you're still interested.**

The names I used for the suitors were the ones I found for my other Brave fanfic "Names." I didn't feel like typing the titles out again and again so I reused the names.

Alright then, please review!

5. Chapter 5

Merida stood, bow strung and pulled taut, Toothless at her side.

Things hadn't gone quite as expected with the Vikings. It was a bit like what had happened at Castle Dun'Broch, but only if you made Neason about ten times bigger and had a whole village of him.

Hiccup had wanted to tell everyone as gently as he could, because he knew that not everyone would agree with his decision. But when he and Merida left his house that morning, the entire village was waiting.

_Ruffnut had told everybody while Hiccup was gone. And boy, were they mad. _There was an angry mob at the bottom of the hill, complete with torches and pitchforks. They were shouting and throwing things._

Someone had thrown a rock at Merida, but Hiccup jumped in its path and was knocked unconscious. Merida and Toothless immediately jumped to defend him.

"_Stop!" Merida was shouting. "Stop! No, you have to stop this! No, no!"_

"No!"

Merida's eyes snapped open. She processed that Hiccup was looming over her in the darkness, looking worried, his hand clamped on her shoulder. Not, in fact, knocked out by a rock. A glance across the room told her that it was still nighttime and Toothless was in his bed, looking at them curiously.

"Hiccup?" she said groggily. She raised her hand and touched his face, just to make sure she wasn't still dreaming. Nope, he was really there. "What're ya doin' awake?"

He placed his hand over hers on his cheek. "You were talking and crying in your sleep and I could hear you from downstairs. You sounded so scared. I had to come and make sure you were alright," he explained.

Merida smiled and pushed herself up with her free arm. "It was just a nightmare. I'm sorry I woke ya." She pulled her knees up to her chest and patted the bed for Hiccup to sit.

"I was just worried about you," he said. He glanced over at his bedside table. His design book and a candlestick were sitting there.

He opened the drawer and pulled out some matches. He struck one several times, but it didn't light. Finally he just sighed and held the candle out towards Toothless. The dragon sent a small flame shooting towards it.

It lit instantly.

"Here," Hiccup said, setting the candle back on the table, "This'll keep the nightmares away. They don't like the fire."

"Seems like having a dragon in the room 'd scare 'em to death," Merida mumbled.

Hiccup laughed. "Seems like, doesn't it?" He rested his hand on her knee. "You gonna be okay?"

"Mmm-hmm," Merida nodded, her curls bouncing. She leaned forward and kissed the tip of Hiccup's nose. "Thanks fer comin' ta check on me."

Hiccup blushed but kissed her back all the same. "Of course." He stood and turned, hobbling back down the steps.

Merida watched him go. When he had disappeared into the darkness downstairs, she turned to Toothless and smiled. "G'night, Toothless," she whispered. The dragon grunted back and tucked his head under his wing.

Merida lay down, her hair falling in front of her face. She peered between the strands at the flickering flame of the candle.

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Crack of dawn the next morning, light was streaming through the skylight of Hiccup's room and right onto Merida's face. She covered her eyes with her arm as she sat up. She opened her eyes cautiously and found that they had adjusted.

Toothless trilled at her happily as he got up and waddled over.

"Morning to you, too, Toothless," Merida yawned. "Can ya do me a favor?" she asked the dragon.

Toothless nodded.

"Go guard the door and keep those men out while I get dressed." She gestured to the top of the stairs. Toothless must have understood, because he went over and positioned himself facing away so that if someone did come up they wouldn't be able to see anything.

Merida pushed back the blanket and pulled her bag onto her lap. She pulled out a brown dress and changed into it. She laced up the sturdy pair of boots that Hiccup had given her the night before, insisting that she'd need them. Then she tapped Toothless on the back so that he lumbered down the steps in front of her.

Stoick had already been up and gone, but Hiccup was sitting at the table, poking disgustedly at a bowl of porridge.

Toothless nudged his master gently with his nose, drawing the boy's attention. He smiled when he saw Merida. "Hey," he said.

"Mornin'." Merida kissed the top of his head and took a seat next to him. "What's for breakfast?"

"Not sure," Hiccup responded. He lifted his spoon and a blob of the stuff plopped back into the bowl. "Might be porridge, might not be. Dad's cooking is kind of iffy." He pushed the bowl away and wrapped his arm around Merida's shoulders, pulling her closer. "I'd recommend not eating it."

Merida was about to respond when the door opened with a bang and the couple jumped.

"Hiccup!" the Thorston twins shouted together as they burst inside. "You're dad said you brought her with you." They froze when they saw Merida turning to look at them. "Whoa," Ruffnut gasped. "That is some hair."

Hiccup rolled his eyes as he pushed himself up from the bench. "Merida," he held out his hand to help her up, "this is Ruffnut and Tuffnut. Ruff, Tuff, meet Merida."

"Pleasure to meet you," Merida greeted the twins, offering her hand to shake.

Ruffnut responded first, spitting into her palm and then shaking Merida's hand. "You're even cooler than I thought you'd be. Are you really a Scottish princess?"

"Yup," Merida responded. "Ma mum's the queen."

"Wicked!" Ruff exclaimed. "Didn't I tell you she'd be cool?" She elbowed her brother in the ribs, but he just continued to gawk at Merida.

Hiccup's eyes narrowed into slits when he noticed the infatuation in Tuffnut's gaze. He took a step forward and wrapped his arm around Merida's waist, pulling her tight to him. She glanced up at him, confused, but didn't protest.

Ruffnut elbowed her brother again, and when he still didn't respond she glanced over at him. She too noticed the way he was staring at Merida and slapped him upside the head. "Knock it off, dummy, she's Hiccup's."

Tuffnut shook his head and blushed. "Sorry," he muttered, and Ruffnut laughed. He growled and lunged to tackle her to the ground. She sidestepped so that he missed and he crashed to the floor. She placed her boot on his back and held him there.

"So," Ruffnut continued, ignoring her brother struggling under her foot, "how're ya liking good ol' Berk? It's probably nothing compared to a castle in Scotland."

"I just got here last night. Haven't really seen much of the place yet," Merida shrugged.

"You've at least seen some dragons, right?" Tuffnut chimed in from the floor.

"Just Toothless," Merida responded. Toothless looked back at them from where he'd been gobbling up his breakfast at an alarming rate.

"Geeze, Hiccup, what've you two been doing?" Ruffnut cried. Tuffnut wiggled his eyebrows suggestively, which only resulted in his sister kicking him in the side. "_Not_ what I meant, bozo." She turned back to Hiccup and Merida. "C'mon, ours is right outside." Ruff lunged forward, grabbing Merida by the wrist. She turned so fast that the princess had to duck to avoid being whacked by one of her heavy braids. Hiccup wasn't so lucky.

Outside, the twins' Zippleback was having a fight between its two heads. Ruffnut whistled and both heads swiveled to look at her. They grinned and slithered over to wind themselves around her and Merida, squeezing the two girls together.

"Boys, this is Merida, she's new here," Ruffnut explained.

One head raised itself so it was level with Merida's face. "Hello," she said nervously. The head opened its mouth, releasing a small cloud of green fumes and making Merida cough.

"No! Bad!" Ruffnut scolded, whacking the head away and waving her hand around to clear the gas. "Sorry about that," she laughed.

Merida smiled as Hiccup and Tuffnut each grabbed a head and untwisted the necks, releasing the girls.

"Not such a great first impression, huh?" Hiccup whispered to Merida, making her laugh.

Just then, Gobber came lumbering up the hill. "'Ey, Hiccup!" he called, waving his prosthetic hand in the air. He came to a stop, patting one of the Zippleback's heads so enthusiastically that you could actually hear it's skull ringing. "Is this the girl?"

Merida stepped forward and held out her hand. "The name's Merida."

"Knew it was somethin' like that," he responded as they shook. "I see ye've met our resident knuckle-heads," he continued, whacking Tuffnut on the back so hard he fell over.

"Yeah, they were introducing her to their dragon," Hiccup nodded.

"Well there's certainly prettier ones out there," Gobber mused.

"Hey! Don't talk about our boys that way!" Ruffnut snapped.

"Wasn't talkin' about the dragon," Gobber replied, winking at Merida. "Ye given her the grand tour yet, Hiccup?"

"I was going to, but then-"

"Well what're ye waitin' for!? Let's get goin'!" He threw one arm around Merida's shoulders and marched off down the hill, Ruff and Tuff on his heels.

Hiccup rolled his eyes and he and Toothless trudged after them. "And there goes her nice relaxing weekend."

oOoOoOoOoOoOo

"Ruffnut, are ya sure about this? We're not exactly the same sizeâ€| Or shape for that matter."

After Gobber had given Merida the tour of the town of Berk, Ruffnut had declared that she was going to give the girl a "Viking Makeover." Before Merida could protest, she'd been whisked away to the Thorston's house and locked in Ruffnut's bedroom.

"Course I'm sure," Ruffnut replied as she sat on her bed and re-braided her hair, facing the other way. "'Sides, it's much easier to ride dragons in a short skirt."

"Alright," Merida conceded. She stepped into the skirt Ruffnut had given her and tried to tug it up to her waist. This was what she'd been afraid of. While Ruffnut was twig thin and just as straight up and down like most young Viking girls were, Merida was curvier and had more meat on her bones.

Thankfully, though, the skirt sat where it was supposed to and wasn't too tight. She was already wearing a pair of brown tights, which were her own. Next was the shirt. It was red and had long sleeves, unlike the sleeveless black top Ruffnut was wearing. She picked up the long thin cord Ruffnut had given her to wear as a belt and wrapped it around her waist several times before tying it in a knot at her hip.

Merida turned to the other girl. "What d'ya think?"

Ruffnut looked up at her. "Pretty good." She stood and walked over, spinning the belt around so the knot was in the back. "Better, but there's something missing." She looked Merida up and down and then snapped her fingers. She took off her fur vest and handed it to her. "Put this on," she commanded and Merida obliged. "Much better," she nodded approvingly.

Merida looked down at herself. The skirt hit just above her knees and was brown, but a shade darker than her tights. The vest was soft tan fur that was really warm.

"Hey, are you wearing a necklace?" Ruffnut asked. "There's this lump here on your chest." She reached out and pinched the cord around Merida's neck, tugging the pendant out from under the shirt. "Whoa, is that a Nightfury?" She gasped, holding it close to her face to see it better.

"Yeah," Merida said. "Hiccup made it for me."

"Wicked." Ruffnut nodded approvingly. "It looks really cool. You should let it hang out." She moved the charm back so it was resting on Merida's chest.

"Maybe I will," Merida agreed, touching it reflexively.

"Let's go show the guys!" Ruffnut cried excitedly. She flung open the door and took off, Merida following behind her.

Downstairs, Tuffnut and Hiccup were playing cards. Neither looked very enthusiastic about it. Hiccup saw the girls enter first.
"Wow."

Tuffnut turned to look as well. "Gee, Ruff, she looks _way_ better in your clothes than you do."

Ruffnut opened her mouth to thank him and then realized that she'd been insulted. With an animalistic growl, she leapt across the room and tackled her brother, who fell out of his seat with a girlish scream.

Hiccup stood and made his way over to Merida, leaving the twins to wrestle under the table. "You look amazing," he said, grinning like an idiot.

"Thanks," Merida said, blushing. "It's a bit odd ta be wearin' such a short skirt. Mum'd have a fit if she saw me." Merida laughed as she pictured the look on her mother's face.

"I was gonna say sorry for letting Ruff drag you off like that, but now I'm not sure if I should," Hiccup teased, nudging her knee with his.

"Don't apologize. Just expect it when I let my friends dress you up when you take me home," Merida grinned and nudged him back.

Hiccup laughed. "That wouldn't be so bad if your friends hadn't tried to kill me yesterday."

Merida shrugged. "Fine, my brothers then."

"That should be fun," Hiccup said, rolling his eyes.

The room darkened as the light that had been coming in through the open door was blocked out. All four teenagers looked up to find Stoick silhouetted in the door, his vast frame filling it completely. The chief turned sideways to fit through more easily and stepped inside, letting the light stream back in. "Hiccup, we've assembled the village in the mead hall. It's time."

Hiccup and Merida glanced at each other nervously. "Five minutes?" he asked his dad.

Stoick nodded stiffly. "Not much more. We don't want to keep them waiting." With that, he turned and left again.

"Can I change before we go?" Merida asked. "I want to look like myself when I meet 'em."

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"Make way everyone! Move aside!" Gobber called to the crowd assembled in Berk's mead hall. The villagers shifted around to clear a path

from the door to the center of the room where Gobber was standing on a raised platform around the fire pit.

Once the way was clear, Stoick started off. Hiccup gripped Merida's hand and led her in after his father. She was glad she had changed back into her own dress. The familiar swish of her long skirt around her ankles was strangely reassuring. Behind them came Toothless and the twins brought up the rear.

When the procession reached the center Stoick, Hiccup, and Merida stood on the higher ground with Gobber. Toothless leapt over their heads and settled in the fire pit. It wasn't lit, but the ashes were still smoldering from the fire that had been there the night before. The twins broke away from the rest of them and struggled through the crowd to join a group of teens that were positioned near the front.

Gobber took off his helmet and banged his hammer hand against it, effectively quieting the villagers. He stepped back and Stoick took center stage.

"My friends," he began, opening his arms in a friendly gesture, "A few months ago my son, Hiccup, turned 17, the time when most young men start considering finding a wife." This statement was met with approving nods and murmurings from those assembled. Tuffnut and one of his friends whooped excitedly, but Stoick shot them a glance that shut them up. "For a while, it seemed as if the boy might never choose—" lots of people laughed and Hiccup frowned, "but the time has finally come. We'd like you all to meet Merida." Stoick swept his arm back, beckoning Merida forward.

Hiccup released her hand and gently nudged her forward. Merida stepped up to Stoick's side and he placed one enormous hand on her shoulder. "Her family is leaders of the Dun'Broch clan of Scotland, and she is the heir to the throne. She will—"

"A Scottish princess?" an incredulous voice shouted, interrupting the chief. A girl, probably about Merida's age, stepped to the front and glared up at them. "Have we all forgotten the history we have with the Scottish people? Think of all the bloodshed! They've hated Vikings as a whole for years!"

"Well, actually, Astrid, Hiccup and Merida's marriage could solve that problem," a chubby boy of about the same age called out. "A union between them could be cause for a truce between the Scottish and the Vikings, or at least us here on Berk. This could be a good thing for all of us."

"Thank you, Fishlegs!" Hiccup responded, stepping up on Merida's other side. "See, it's a good thing, guys."

"How do we know she's not a spy?" an old man with a long staff and a sheep hollered.

"For once Mildew has a point!" the girl, Astrid, continued. She pushed herself up onto the raised stones and turned to talk to the people. "How do we know she's not just here to gather information about us? She could be taking note of weaknesses, even sabotaging us. And she'll take everything she knows back to Scotland so they can come and wage war on us!"

"I would never!" Merida gasped. She stepped away from Hiccup and got up in Astrid's face. "I am here for Hiccup, and only Hiccup, because I love him. I would never hurt any of ya because I know how much he cares about ya all. And also, my father is not looking for any war, particularly right now. I may have started a war between my own people!"

Astrid turned and the two girls glared at each other. The crowd started shouting and offering other their opinions. Most agreed with Astrid, but a few voices were supporting Merida.

"That's enough! Shut up, the lot of ya!" Stoick bellowed and the sound died down.

Merida and Astrid remained nose to nose, staring each other down. Hiccup stepped between them. He pushed Merida one way and Astrid the other.

Stoick cleared his throat. "Astrid makes a valid point." Hiccup and Merida cried out indignantly. "But," he said, shooting them a look, "Hiccup trusts Merida, and I trust my son. We don't believe that she would ever do anything against Berk."

Astrid scoffed. "Hiccup would trust an Outcast if he had a good enough sob story."

"Maybe you're right Astrid," Hiccup spat with a scowl. "I mean, I trusted you, didn't I?"

Everybody gasped. Astrid's eyes widened and she screamed. She whirled, leapt down and landed with a thunk. People moved to create a path as she stormed out, leaving whispering in her wake.

"Well, that went better than I thought," Stoick muttered. "Alright, does anyone _else_ have something to say?"

The room was silent. No one even breathed.

"Good. Alright then. Off with ya."

Everyone started talking at once. The crowd began to flow out of the room, Stoick and Gobber left as well. The only people that remained were Hiccup, Merida, Toothless, and the group of teens from the front of the crowd.

"Well that was exciting," Tuffnut commented.

Hiccup grunted and hopped down, stumbling on his prosthetic. He righted himself and held his hand out to help Merida down. She declined his offer of help and stepped off, landing much more gracefully than her fiancÃ©. She smirked, satisfied, and Hiccup smiled back.

"'Exciting' wouldn't exactly be the word I used," the chubby boy, Fishlegs, interjected. "'Tense,' maybe 'stressful,' even 'terrifying.' Definitely not 'exciting' though."

"Oh come on, you babies. It wasn't that bad!" a third boy put in. He was short, thick, and had a nose shaped like a pig's. "I thought it

was epic! The old girlfriend and the fianc  face off in front of the whole village. Songs could be written about that!"

"Hey, Snotlout," Hiccup said, his voice tight. "Why don't you go see where Astrid went?"

Snotlout brightened at the mention of the girl. "Okay!" he exclaimed, and scrambled out.

"Still can't believe you two are cousins," Fishlegs mused. "You look nothing alike."

"He's your cousin?" Merida asked Hiccup.

"Unfortunately, yes," Hiccup admitted with a sigh. "Although I tend to deny it. My dad and his are brothers."

"Thankfully, there's no resemblance," Merida grinned. "I don't think I'd like ya as much if ya had that pig nose."

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Hiccup gazed down at his and Merida's reflections on the water. They were down in the cove where he had met and trained Toothless, sitting on a fallen tree over the water. They weren't talking, didn't need to, were just enjoying each other's company. Hiccup kicked at the water, sending ripples out and distorting the image.

"What's the matter?" Merida asked. She slid her hand over and on top of his.

Hiccup turned his hand over and twined their fingers together. "Your first impression of Berk wasn't the best possible. Although, it really doesn't get much better."

Merida laughed quietly. "Don't be so hard on it. Yer friends 're nice. And yer father. And this place is beautiful."

Hiccup smiled. "Yeah, I guess it's not that bad."

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**Meanwhile, on Outcast Island**

A bird flitted through the air, evading blast after blast of dragon fire. It screeched as a Deadly Nadder's careful aim singed its wing. The bird spiraled uncontrollably and hurtled towards the ground. It smacked against the stones and died at the feet of a man who had just finished off a Gronkle. He looked down at the dead bird, about to kick it out of the way and continue with the never ending battle. Then he noticed a small piece of paper tied around its leg. He picked up the carcass and slipped the note off. He unrolled it, and he mouth spread into a crooked toothed grin.

The man ran through the ruins and rubble that was the Outcast City. He sped past man after man engaged in battle with the dragons, inspecting the face of each. Finally he found the man he was looking for.

"Alvin!" he cried.

The Outcast's leader turned, snarling at the man. "What do you _want_, Karr?"

Karr flinched. "We received a message from the spies on Berk, sir." He held out the paper, his hand shaking. Karr was by no means a small man, but even the strongest of Outcast warriors feared Alvin the Treacherous.

"Give me that!" Alvin snapped, snatching the paper away. His eyes scanned the runes and he smiled in much the same manner as Karr had. "Well lookie here! It seems that our Dragon Conqueror has found himself a fiancÃ©. And a Scottish princess, no less!" He turned back to Karr and commanded, "Ready the ships. It would only be right to go and congratulate the happy couple."

BUM-BUM-BUM! Uh oh, Alvin is on his way. That can't be good.

Alright, a couple things:

I've decided that Merida and Ruffnut should be friends. They just seem like they'd get along, and it's going to come into play later. Also, I know Ruffnut seems a bit mature, but this is four years after the movie. She's about 17 or 18, so she would have matured at least a bit. And, girls mature faster than boys anyway. It's a scientific fact.

Does the twins' Zippieback have an official name/names? I can't seem to find one. If there isn't one, I'm going to make two up (one for each head). If you have any suggestions for names, let me know.

I genuinely **_love **_**the Thorston twins! They're just so much fun.**

Thank you guys for all the support. I know it's been awhile and I hope you haven't given up on me. I love you guys!

6. Chapter 6

OMG! Leoluvr's not dead! It's a miracle.

So, no. I am not dead. I go to school. It causes major problems. It's annoying. And I'm sorry this took so long. There is really no excuse. Please forgive and keep reading. It would really make me happy.

* * *

><p>"And what gives you the right to declare that the wedding be held here?"<p>

Moaning, Hiccup dropped his head against the thick wood of the table in castle Dun'Broch. His father sat at the foot of the table and to the right of Hiccup. At the head of the table sat Queen Elinor, Fergus on her right and Merida on her left.

"Several reasons," Elinor replied calmly. "Firstly, a traditional Scottish wedding is held in the bride's town."

"If ya hadn't noticed, Your Majesty, this isn't your traditional Scottish wedding," Stoick cut in.

"I am aware," Elinor agreed. "But there is more. Because of our family's position, it is required that we invite the other three clans to the wedding."

"We have an entire tribe as well," the Viking chief shot back.

"Understood. However, sailing to Berk from Dun'Broch is two day journey at best, and some of the clans are even farther out. Your son has informed me, though, that by dragon flight it only takes a day."

Stoick shot a glare at his son, who had lifted his head from the table. Hiccup shrugged. "I didn't think it was important," he whispered defensively. Stoick shook his head and turned back to continue his discussion with the Queen.

Hiccup propped his head in his hand and glanced down the table. He found that Merida was looking back at him. They both smiled and blushed before looking away again.

"You make a valid argument, Majesty," Stoick conceded.

Elinor folded her hands on the table in front of her. "I wasn't aware that we were arguing, Stoick. The only logical outcome will be for the wedding to take place in Dun'Broch. There really isn't anything to quarrel about."

The chief seemed caught off guard by her nonchalance. _He _had thought that they were arguing. The other three people in the room shifted their eyes back and forth between Stoick and Elinor, waiting uncomfortably for something to happen.

Stoick groaned and rubbed his face with one meaty hand. "Alright. I'll inform the tribe. We'll need to stay in contact, since I assume you'll be planning the whole thing."

Looking down the table once more, Hiccup noticed the proud smile Merida was trying to hide behind her hand. He grinned and shook his head. As much as she tried to pretend otherwise, Merida took great pride in her mother.

Elinor continued the conversation. "Yes, we'll keep in touch throughout the process of planning so you know what will be required on your end. Hiccup?"

The boy looked up in surprise when she addressed him. "Yes, ma'am?"

"Would you be willing to serve as a messenger?"

"Of course," he agreed, nodding vigorously. _'Any excuse to spend more time here,' _he thought.

The queen clapped her hands, satisfied. "Good, now that that's settled, Merida," she turned to her daughter, "it's time for you to be measured for your dress. Come along."

"Aw, Mum!" Merida cried indignantly. "Do I really _need _ a new dress? I have lots a perfectly good dresses."

Rolling her eyes, Elinor said, "Merida, this is your wedding. You need a new dress. Now, come. The seamstress is waiting in your room."

Merida grumbled something under her breath.

"What was that?" Elinor snapped.

"Nothing, Mum," the girl replied almost immediately. She stood and took the long way around the table so she could walk past Hiccup. She stopped behind him and bent to kiss his cheek. "If you can, by any means necessary," she whispered in his ear, "get. Me. Out." She gave him one last desperate look and then followed her mother up the stairs.

Once the women were gone, Fergus and Stoick rose from their seats and walked towards each other.

"You're daughter's quite the feisty one, isn't she?" Stoick said with a chuckle, extending his hand to the other man.

"Aye. Mah wife as well," Fergus replied, accepting and shaking Stoick's hand.

As the fathers laughed and talked together, Hiccup sat at the table and observed. He was simply watching when he felt a tug at his pant leg. He jumped and ducked his head under the table to find the triplets on their hands and knees. "What's up, guys?" he asked.

The one on the left, Hamish, pressed a finger to his lips. Hiccup copied the gesture to show that he understood. The boy in the middle, Harris, motioned for Hiccup to follow them. Hubert, the last one, led the way, first darting between Hiccup's legs and making a dash for the door, his brothers on his heels. Figuring that it would be more interesting than sitting there and watching a conversation he hadn't been invited to take part in, Hiccup followed them out.

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"I'm sorry, you want me to do what so you can what?" Hiccup questioned the triplets after they'd revealed their plan to him.

"We want you to run into the kitchen," Hamish reiterated.

"With Toothless," Hubert added, pointing to the dragon sitting obediently behind them.

"So we can steal the cakes!" Harris finished.

Hiccup rubbed his forehead. "No way. You're know I'm trying to get your parents to like me, right?"

The triplets shrugged in unison.

"Oh well," Hamish said.

"We just thought we'd ask for your help," Hubert assisted.

"We were going to do it either way." As he said this, Harris produced a fish from behind his back. He waved it in front of Toothless' face and then all three boys bolted to the kitchen door, Night Fury on their heels.

"Hey, wait!" Hiccup cried, chasing after them. It was already too late.

Hamish and Hubert pushed open the door and Harris flung the fish inside. Toothless, of course, chased after it and bounded into the kitchen. By the time Hiccup got there the servants inside were already screaming and running out as Toothless tried to find the elusive fish. The triplets seized their opportunity and ran inside during the confusion. They nabbed an entire plate of cakes before dashing back out. One left it to his brothers to carry their teetering loot while he jumped up and grabbed Hiccup's hand, dragging him along. Hiccup inserted the fingers of his free hand into his mouth and whistled, summoning Toothless. By the time the guards, having been alerted by the screams, arrived, all that was left was an empty kitchen in disarray.

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Hiccup was sitting on a wall in the sunny castle courtyard, sketching in his journal and trying to look as innocent as possible. He was glancing up from his drawing every few seconds to make sure there weren't any angry guards storming towards him. During one of the brief periods of time when he wasn't watching his back, someone hopped onto the wall and sat next to him, scaring him out of his wits.

Merida laughed and said, "Careful there," when her fiancÃ© nearly toppled off the wall in shock. She grabbed him by the collar as he fell backwards and hauled him back up. When he wasn't in danger of cracking his head open on the hard packed dirt, she proceeded with her purpose for coming over. "Apparently, the kitchen was attacked by a demon as black as the night earlier, and when the cooks went back in the only thing missing was a plate of cakes. Ye wouldn't know anything about, would ye?"

"Why would I know anything about that?" Hiccup replied nervously, his voice rising as he spoke.

"Just asking," Merida said, pretending like she believed him. She smirked and winked at him.

Changing the subject, Hiccup said, "So, how did your dress thing go?"

Merida groaned dramatically. She turned so she was laying on the wall with her head in Hiccup's lap. "Horrible. I got poked and prodded and measured and it was a nightmare!" She yanked her fingers through her curls and then grabbed Hiccup's hand and covered her face with it. She moaned once more.

"Poor thing," Hiccup teased with a mocking grin that she couldn't see. With the hand that wasn't covering Merida's face he pulled his journal out from under her. "Better?" he asked.

"Yes, actually," she replied, her voice muffled by his hand.
"Thanks."

He rolled his eyes. "No problem. Wouldn't want my princess to be uncomfortable."

Peeking up between Hiccup's fingers, Merida glared at him. She pushed his hand off her face and sat up, sticking her tongue out playfully.
"Knock it off, Viking."

He smirked. "As you wish, Princess."

The couple sat there, talking and laughing. Hiccup let Merida flip through his sketchbook and see his drawings. He was blushing as she came across a page with a drawing of her when Maudie scurried up to them.

"Princess," the maid said, wringing her hands in front of her.

"Yes, Maudie?" Merida responded.

"Yer needed in the hall. Both of ye."

Hiccup looked at Merida. She looked back up at him and shrugged. Both slid off the wall and followed Maudie inside.

They approached the hall and the sounds of shouting got louder as they got closer. Merida entered first. As soon as she saw what awaited them inside, she stopped short and whirled around, shoving Hiccup away and motioning for him to stay where he was. She moved back out into the open and the volume immediately increased.

Poking his head around the corner, Hiccup saw Fergus, Stoick, and the three older Scottish lords shouting at each other. Elinor sat calmly in her throne, watching the squabbling men. When she noticed Merida coming in, she beckoned her daughter over.

"Mum?" Merida questioned.

"Watch and learn, dear," Elinor said. She rose from her throne and walked into the fray. The men all halted, mouths agape and arms raised. "That will be enough of that infernal shouting, gentlemen."

Fergus' jaw snapped shut and he lowered his arm. "Sorry, Elinor," he murmured sheepishly.

"Well I'm not sorry!" Lord Macintosh snapped. "You broke your promise!"

Lord Dingwall stepped up to his side. "For once, I agree. Your daughter said she would marry on of our sons."

"I said nothing of the sort!" Merida cried indignantly, coming forward. "Your sons and I agreed that we would choose who we married."

I never said that I would absolutely choose one of them."

"Oh, please. You know that's what we all thought," MacGuffin interjected.

"And the one ye did choose is a Viking!" Macintosh cried.

Stoick growled. "What's so wrong with a Viking?"

The uproar started once more but Elinor cut them off. "Men! Let's stop quarreling like boys, shall we?" She turned to her daughter. "Where is Hiccup, darling?"

It took every ounce of will power Merida had to not glance behind her at the corridor, but it turned out that her efforts were for naught. Hiccup had crept farther into the room to observe the fighting and was now clearly in sight.

"Look at him!" Dingwall shouted. "He's as big around as my little finger!"

Macintosh smirked. "He's got more muscle than your boy, Dingwall," he snickered.

"Why you-" Dingwall turned on the taller man.

"You want to fight, pipsqueak?" Macintosh encouraged, spreading his arms

"WOULD YOU KNOCK IT OFF!" Merida roared. "I don't know what ye think this is going to change. I'm going ta marry Hiccup." Something popped into her head, a memory of a chubby boy back on Berk. "And this will create an alliance between us and the Vikings of Berk. We won't have to worry about fighting them anymore."

Something changed in the lords' eyes. The thought of an alliance appealed to them. They weren't done fighting yet though. MacGuffin spat out, "But-"

"Lord MacGuffin," Merida cut him off. "I'd like ta tell ye that nothing you say will change my decision. I _will_ _marry_ Hiccup."

MacGuffin's mouth snapped shut as Macintosh and Dingwall's dropped open for them to object.

"Nothing _any_ of you say will change my mind. Continuing to fight this would just be a waste of your energy." Merida stood as straight as possible, staring down the lords. "I hope that our clans can remain friends, and we- no _I _- would be honored to have you present at my wedding."

There were several tense moments of silence. They ended when Dingwall huffed, "Fine," and stormed out of the room. Macintosh gave a sharp nod and left as well. MacGuffin shrugged, smiled slightly, and took his leave.

Elinor beamed proudly. "Well done, Merida. You handled that perfectly."

Merida smiled bashfully. "Thanks, Mum."

Fergus hugged his daughter, crushing her to his chest. "Yer just like yer mother."

Her face still pressed against her father, Merida cringed. She wasn't sure whether or not that was a good thing but she decided to take it as a compliment. "Thanks, Dad. Not that I don't love ya or anything, but I can't breathe."

"Whoops, sorry, dear." He released her and she quickly took a step back.

Now that Merida was standing beside him, Hiccup leaned over and bumped her shoulder with his. "Thanks," he said.

Merida smirked and bumped him back. "Yer welcome."

Hiccup bumped her again. She elbowed him. He elbowed her. Soon enough, they were shoving each other and laughing.

"That will be enough, children," Elinor said kindly. Hiccup and Merida both stood at attention, hands held behind their backs. When they glanced at each other, though, they burst out laughing again. Elinor rolled her eyes. She absentmindedly smoothed a loose curl out of her daughter's face as she thought, "_Young love._"

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Before the sun rose the next morning, Toothless and Thornado were saddled up. The pair of dragons stood side by side in the castle courtyard. Stoick was just inside the door, saying goodbye to Fergus.

Hiccup was next to Toothless, petting him and making sure he was ready for the long flight home. He glanced up at Merida's windows. He had told Maudie not to wake her since they were leaving so early, but he was starting to regret his decision. Not only would she give him heck next time they saw each other, he sort of wanted to say goodbye. As he was lost in his melancholy train of thought, a pair of thin arms wrapped around him from behind.

"Ya didn't think ya could get away without sayin' goobye now, did ya?" a familiar voice whispered, although it was still weighed down with sleep. This was early, even for her.

Hiccup laughed and turned around to be greeted by a mess of orange curls. He pushed them away until he found Merida's face underneath and smiled when he finally did. "I didn't think bedhead was possible for you, but obviously I was wrong," he said.

Merida scowled, but a smile was tugging at her lips. She tightened her grip around him and murmured, "At least I don't have morning breath."

Suddenly self conscious, Hiccup turned his head away from her and breathed into his hand. She burst out laughing.

"Kidding," she gasped between giggles. "I'm sorry, I couldn't

resist." She used his riding harness to pull herself up and peck him on the lips. "Fly safe, okay?" she whispered when she dropped away again.

"I always fly safe," he replied.

"Oh yeah?" Merida said. "What happened to this leg then, hmm?"

He chuckled. She had a point there. "Okay. I promise I'll fly safe." He kissed her forehead then her lips. "Don't go off angering magic bears, okay?"

"That was a one time thing!" she cried, stepping back. "Get going, Viking, or you won't be back to Berk before dark."

"I'd be gone already," he said. "But a certain princess is holding me up." He turned away. When he glanced over his shoulder to see her reaction, she looked sort of hurt. He rolled his eyes and turned around again. "Kidding, Mer," he assured her. "Kidding."

Merida gave Hiccup one more hug. She released him just as Stoick walked over. "Let's get going, son," he said, clapping his hand on Hiccup's shoulder. He smiled at Merida. "It was nice to come a visit your home. It seems I'll be seeing more of it soon enough."

"It was an honor to have you," Merida said with a slight nod.

The Vikings mounted their dragons. Merida was forced to step back so Toothless would have room to spread his wings. Hiccup waved and Toothless winked at her. Merida had just started to wave back when they took off.

The redhead ran down to the docks, chasing after them. She held her skirts up in one hand and waved with the other. She knew Hiccup was going slower than he normally would so she could keep up. When she reached the end of the dock, she stopped, simply leaning out and waving. Toothless fired a blast into the open air as a farewell salute and then they were gone.

Merida made her way back up to the castle much more slowly. She dragged her feet, realizing now that Hiccup was gone that she was still a bit tired. Within the castle walls her mother and father were waiting for her.

"Good morning, Mum, Dad," the princess greeted her parents. She kissed each on the cheek as she always did.

Elinor bent down to kiss her daughter's forehead. She had to hold her hair back now that she no longer wore it in braids. "Good morning dear," she replied. "Did you sleep well?"

Merida nodded, rubbing her eyes and yawning.

The queen shook her head. "Very good. Now then, come along. There's much to prepare before the wedding."

"Aw, Mum!"

* * *

><p>Okay, there's a lot of fluff in here. A LOT of fluff. But that's okay. Because stuff is gonna happen soon. Bad stuff. Don't forget, Alvin knows about the wedding now. So that's something.

I should have more time to write over the summer. Should. Dunno. Maybe. Let's hope. I got lots of projects. I owe my friend an Ouran High School Host Club/Macbeth crossover. It's gonna be called MacOhtori. If you're interested you can look forward to that.

7. Chapter 7

Two weeks after he'd left, Hiccup was back in Dun'Broch. This was the time frame he'd set up with Elinor before the previous departure. Toothless circled low over the castle so as not to startle the guards. They'd had a few incidents on previous visits. However, one of the men on the perimeter waved them down and they descended into the courtyard. As soon as he had undone the safety line and set foot on the ground he was being tackled and toppling back into his dragon.

Merida clutched Hiccup's collar and looked desperately at him. "Get. Me. Out. Of. Here," she hissed. Hiccup's hands on her waist gently pushed her away. She seemed slightly embarrassed at her less than friendly welcome, but he smiled reassuringly.

"Care to tell me why?" he chuckled.

She opened her mouth to answer him but was interrupted. "Merida?" Elinor called from the castle doors. Her daughter visibly flinched and ducked around Hiccup, shoving him in front of her. "Oh, hello, Hiccup," Elinor greeted the boy. "That wouldn't happen to be my daughter hiding behind you, would it?"

He lifted one arm and glanced back at her. She shook her head vigorously. "Um, no?" he responded, more than slightly confused.

"Honestly, Merida! You're acting like a child. I get better behavior from your brothers," Elinor sighed, striding over to the couple. She pulled the princess out of her inadequate hiding spot by the ear.

Merida swatted at her mother's hand. "I'm getting away from all the planning," she snapped. "Honestly, how long does it take to get one dress to fit? Surely not this long. Surely!"

Elinor ignored her, speaking to Hiccup instead. "Do you have a message from your father, dear?"

"Oh, right!" He stepped back to Toothless and flipped open the saddle bag. He removed a bulky letter addressed to the queen. "Sorry, Dad had a lot to say," he apologized as he delivered it to her.

"No trouble. I expected as much," she said with a small smile. "Thank you. I'll get right to this so you can get my response to him as soon as possible." At that, she returned to the castle, leaving Hiccup and Merida alone.

Without a word, both of them climbed onto Toothless' back. Hiccup didn't even strap them in, they weren't going very far. They simply ascended to the top of the highest tower and dismounted again. Together they sat with their feet dangling over the edge, the Nightfury curled up behind them as a back rest.

"I wasn't kidding, you know," Merida murmured after a long period of comfortable silence.

Hiccup rested his arm across her shoulders and she leaned into him. "About what?" he inquired.

"Getting out of here," she reminded him. She turned her blue eyes up to him. "I need to leave. At least for a little while."

He kissed her forehead. "I'll see what I can do." She grinned and fiddled with one of the braids in his hair. "That reminds me," he said suddenly. "I've got some things for you." He reached behind him, flipped open the saddle bags again and produced a cloth wrapped package. "That's from Ruffnut. I don't know what it is, though, so I'd be careful."

She gave him a sarcastic look and sat forward, setting it in her lap. She unwound the wrappings and revealed two outfits, including the one she'd tried on in Ruff's room. "I'll have to thank her next time I see her," Merida beamed. "This is too nice."

Her fianc   rubbed his neck sheepishly. "Well, that makes my gift look less impressive." He pulled something else out of the saddle bag, this one unwrapped. She accepted the tangle of leather straps and tried to make sense of it, turning it over and over to figure out what it was. "It's a harness," Hiccup explained. He reached around her and held it up the right way.

The harness was similar to his original design. Much simpler than the complicated vest he now wore when riding. It had straps that would go over her shoulders and two that would go around her stomach. One of the belts had a metal ring attached to a tether.

"This," Hiccup elaborated, lifting the cord. "Can clip to the back of my harness or to the main tether. This way we won't have to worry about you being safe so much."

Her lips curled up and she wiped at her eyes. This gift meant more to her than he probably intended it to. On their previous long flights, he'd tied a rope around her waist as a makeshift lifeline. This well-crafted gift was an acknowledgement of the fact that they'd be spending a lot more time flying together in the future. "Thank you," she said earnestly. She stretched up and kissed him quickly. "Would you mind if we gave it a test flight?"

He looked over his shoulder at Toothless, who was passed out in the warmth of the setting sun. "I don't think Toothless is up to it tonight. Tomorrow, though, I promise. Especially if your mom says you can come to Berk with me."

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By the time the sun set and Merida and Hiccup were forced to go inside for dinner, Elinor had finished reading and responding to

Stoick's letter. She gave an envelope to Hiccup that was addressed to his father in elegant script. The letter was at least as long as the one the queen had received, if not longer.

"So, Mum," Merida said quietly as they ate. "Can I ask you a question?"

"Of course, darling."

"We've been working so hard planning for the wedding," she said hesitantly. She stared at a spot above her mother's head as she searched for the words that would help her get what she wanted. "And I think we could both use a little break." Elinor looked up from her plate and her expression did not show agreement. Merida's mind reeled as she scrabbled for another point. "And â€" I'm going to be living on Berk, but I feel like I hardly know it. I've only been there once. I need to go again before I'm sure I actually want to spend the rest of my life there."

Hiccup choked on his food. "Excuse me?" he coughed and gave her a startled look. She shot one back that told him to shut up.

"Merida, I know what you're trying to do," Elinor said calmly, going back to her meal. "And the answer is no."

"Mum, please," Merida whined. "All I ask is one week. One week and I'll come back and try on that stupid dress as many times as you want. I swear."

Elinor shook her head without even looking up at her daughter. Fergus reached over to her and put his hand on her shoulder. "Elinor, dear, it obviously means a lot to her. Maybe we should let her go. It's only for a week."

The queen pressed her face into her hand, exasperated. "Am I completely alone on this?" She looked up at her family. Merida and Fergus simply looked at her, the triplets nodded, and Hiccup hid a smile behind his hand. "Fine! What do I care! Run off for a vacation while we're planning your wedding. Go for two weeks!"

"Really?" Merida gasped, excited.

"No!" Elinor cried. "One week. I want you back here in one week." She looked directly at Hiccup. "Am I understood?"

"Yes, ma'am." He nodded.

"Alright then," she sighed. "Have fun, come back alive."

"Thank you, Mum," Merida beamed. "I'll try my hardest not to get killed."

oOoOoOoOoOoOo

Merida awoke on her bedroom floor the next morning.. She groaned at a sharp jab of pain in her hip. Her eyes were cemented closed from sleep but she managed to crack them open. She saw her brothers leaning over the edge of her bed and smirking down at her. Her fiancÃ© was crouched next to her with a similar expression.

"Good morning, sunshine," Hiccup greeted. "Ready to head for Berk?" He leaned down as if to kiss her but she shoved him away. He toppled over onto his back, his legs splaying out in front of him.

"I'd be much happier to see ye if ye hadn't let the terrible terrors push me out of bed," she grumbled. She got up and tossed the three little boys off her bed. "Out, all of ye. I have to get dressed."

The triplets helped Hiccup up and the four boys trooped out, closing the door behind them.

Merida knelt before the chest at the foot of her bed and opened it. She pulled out the clothes Ruffnut had sent for her. She selected the outfit she'd already worn once and put the other in her bag for the trip. It would be good to have it on Berk.

When getting dressed, Merida put on the brown skirt and red shirt, but omitted the cord belt in favor of her new harness. She struggled into it, but once she had figured out how to get it on it fit perfectly. After she was sure it was on correctly she added the fuzzy vest and her Nightfury amulet. She pulled on the boots she'd been given on her last trip to Berk and put her usual shoes and clothes in the bag. She quickly braided her hair and then ran out of her room.

'_Please be asleep, please be asleep,'_ the princess prayed as she crept to the courtyard. She wouldn't hear the end of it if her mother saw her ensemble. She'd made it through the great hall and was almost in the clear. But Elinor was already in the courtyard with Hiccup and the boys.

Hiccup smiled at the sight of Merida. Elinor wasn't nearly as excited. "What are you wearing?" she gasped.

"This is what girls wear on Berk. Better for riding dragons," Merida muttered, pushing a stray curl out of her face. She crammed her bag into one of Toothless' saddlebags and then swung up on his back, carefully not looking at her mother.

"You can't be serious!" the queen laughed, as if her daughter was joking.

"Nope, I'm serious," the daughter assured her. "Quite comfortable actually."

Elinor glared at Hiccup. "Did you bring these clothes for her?" she snapped.

"No, my friend Ruffnut sent them," Hiccup defended. "I had no idea. Honestly, I think Merida looks great." He glanced over his shoulder and caught her blushing.

"Ruffnut?" Elinor questioned. "That's a girl's name?" Hiccup nodded. "Berk is sincerely a strange place. Indecent clothing and such odd names. Are you sure about this, darling?" She looked pleadingly at Merida.

"Yes, Mum, I'm sure," she groaned. "Can we go now please? It's not like I can change their fashions or their names so ye'll have to live

with it."

The mother rolled her eyes and strode to the dragon's side. She pulled Merida down and kissed her forehead before righting her again. "Be safe, dear." She gave Hiccup's shoulder a squeeze and then stepped back.

"Goodbye, Mum, I love you. Tell Dad I love him, too." Merida scooted backwards so Hiccup could climb on.

He twisted around and grabbed the tether on the front of her harness and clipped it to the back of his. He gave it an experimental tug and asked, "Ready to go?"

"Please," she sighed into his ear, slipping her arms under his and holding on.

"Let's go, Bud," Hiccup urged Toothless. The dragon took a few running steps and then leapt into the air.

Merida unwrapped one arm from his chest to wave to her mom and brothers. When the castle had faded from view she raised both above her head and shouted, "FREEDOM!"

Hiccup laughed out loud, turning back to look at her. "She's just looking out for you, you know. Your mom," he said when she had calmed down. "She's just worried about you leaving."

"She's smothering me," Merida complained. "I'm not a child. She doesn't need to watch my every move."

He shrugged, bouncing her head on his shoulder. "I don't know. It might be nice to have someone looking after you like that. My mom never got the chance."

She looked at him silently for a moment and then pecked him on the cheek. "She's proud of you, Hic. I know it," she assured him.

He smiled slightly. "I guess. Just, don't be so hard on you mom, is all I'm saying. She'd doing what she thinks is best for you."

"I'll try," she promised. "I mean, I did swear to try on that dress as many times as she wants."

"What's the dress look like anyway?" he questioned.

"Can't tell you," she answered. "It's bad luck to know what the bride is going to look like before the wedding."

"Aw, come on," he whined. "It's not like seeing you in the dress. Just tell me what it looks like."

She sighed dramatically and said, "If you insist."

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A few hours later

"Hey, Mer? You wanna try something?"

She leaned over Hiccup's shoulder, giving him a suspicious look. "I don't trust that tone. You're up to something."

He quirked an eyebrow. "Come on, it'll be fun." With that he unclipped his tether from saddle and hers from his back. He secured her to the saddle, clicked Toothless' tailfin into a different position, and raised himself up on his knees. "Scoot forward here. Put your handsâ€¦ yeah that's it."

Merida's fists locked where Hiccup had placed them. He crawled around so he was sitting behind her. He pushed her foot forward so she could control the tailfin. "Hiccup, I've got no idea what I'm doin' here."

"You're fine, just do what I tell you." He put his hands on hers. "Click the tailfin up one notch and pull to your right." He guided her hands on the reins and Toothless banked gently to the right. "There you go."

With Hiccup's guidance, Merida managed to fly Toothless for a good fifteen minutes. He told her how to encourage the dragon into a climb and they flew up above the clouds. The whiteness spread out below them for miles.

"Looks like Dun'Broch in winter," Merida said. "Only better."

"Try going down," Hiccup commanded. "Just the opposite of what you did to come up."

A bit too eagerly, Merida directed Toothless to dive. He went down sharply and she cried out, startled. They burst through the other side of the clouds to find towers of rocks looming up below them. She panicked and snatched her foot back from the controls.

"Whoa, whoa!" Hiccup snapped his prosthetic back on the control and clicked the tailfin into position. He pushed Merida's hands out of the way and yanked up, moving them back to safety.

"I'm sorry!" Merida cried.

Hiccup laughed. "It's fine, Mer! I've gotten myself into _much _worse situations than that. There wasn't really a problem."

"Even so, you should be in control," she insisted. She started unclipping herself so he could get in front again, but he stilled her hand with his own.

"I can fly fine from back here." He settled his arms around her to make his point apparent.

She smiled and leaned back into him. "If you say so."

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That night, Merida was settling in for bed when there was a knock from the staircase. "Can I come up?" Hiccup called to her.

"'Course," she called and he came the rest of his way up. "It's your

room after all." She perched on the edge of the bed and folded her legs in front of her. "Thanks for lettin' me use it, by the way."

"Hey, no problem," Hiccup said. He came and stopped next to her. He leaned across the bed and grabbed a pencil out of his nightstand. "Just needed one of these." He tapped her on the nose with it and set it in her lap before leaning over again. He pulled out the same candle he'd produced last time she was there, and actually managed to light it himself this time.

"No nightmares," Merida said, pointing at the candle. "I still think that dragon should do the trick, though."

"You do what you've gotta do," Hiccup shrugged and grinned at her. He rose back to his full height and took his pencil. "Good night, princess. Love you."

She rose up on her knees and kissed him, then collapsed back onto the bed. Her arms flopped on either side of her and her hair floofed out in a bushy cloud around her. "G'night. Love ya too, Viking."

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Before dawn the next morning, Merida was being gently shaken awake. Her eyes cracked open to see Hiccup above her yet again. "See," she sighed, "this is much more pleasant than being shoved out of bed." She attempted to smile at her fiancÃ©, but it was ruined by a yawn. "What time even is it?"

"You don't have to get up yet," Hiccup assured her. "But there's a dragon related problem that my dad and I have to take care of. We might be gone all day. I just wanted to tell you."

"Gotcha," she nodded. "Thanks for lettin' me know. Now, shoo. I want to get back to sleeeeep!"

Hiccup chuckled softly and stroked her bangs back from her forehead. "Alright. Go find Gobber when you're up. I'll tell him you're coming. Love you."

She waved a hand and pressed her face into the pillow. "Yeah, yeah, love ya, too."

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Merida grabbed an apple off the table as she left Hiccup's house. Wearing one of the Berkian outfits Ruffnut had sent for her, she half skipped down the hill, hoping she remembered where Gobber's forge was. She got into the central part of town and turned in a slow circle, looking around. As she wandered off in what she guessed was the right direction, she was aware of several people watching her. She tugged at her Night Fury pendant self-consciously.

Sticking her head through the front window of a shop, Merida shouted, "Gobber?"

"Merida!" Gobber cheered from inside. He came lumbering up to the front, beaming at her. "Hiccup told me you were coming! Come on in!"

He ushered her into the shop and gestured around. "Spending the day with the dragon dentist, this should be fun!"

As the dragons and their owners/riders started arriving, Merida got a crash course in species identification and tooth making. The busier it got, the more Gobber needed her help.

Dashing inside to Gobber, Merida shouted, "We've got a Zippleback and a Gronckle." She walked over to see what the Viking needed from her, tying her hair back to keep it more off her sweaty neck.

"Grab me my tongs, will ya?" Gobber requested. Merida grabbed the hand attachment off the rack and switched it in for him. "Thank ya. Watch yer back!" She ducked as he swung over her head.

It continued on like that for a while. Merida did her best to identify what each dragon needed and run the requests in to Gobber. She fetched tools for him and kept the forge going when he had to install a tooth.

During a lull in activity, Gobber was grinding a tooth while Merida sat on a bench and watched him. "Who helps you most days?" she asked curiously.

"Eh, Hiccup's in here doing his saddles," Gobber explained. He gestured to the other half of the shop, which was filled with leather and wood and hadn't been touched all day. "He steps in when I need him. I trained him, ya know. Before he was a big, mighty dragon trainer, he was my apprentice. Wasn't very good at it, little twig of a thing, but he had the determination and the smarts to get the job done."

"You did a fine job of it, Gobber." Merida grinned at the ring that glittered on her finger.

There was a commotion outside that made Merida jump. "Go see what it is," Gobber commanded, waving his hand towards the door. She hopped off the counter and walked out the door.

Barf and Belch were weaving their way through the center of town with the twins on board. They slithered to a halt in front of the forge and the Thorstons hopped off.

"Someone said you were back!" Ruffnut said in way of greeting. She marched over and slugged Merida on the shoulder. "I new you couldn't stay away."

"My mum's going crazy with the wedding plans, I needed a break," Merida explained.

Tuffnut looked around. "Hey, where's Hiccup?"

"Some sort of dragon problem," Merida shrugged. "I've been helping Gobber all day."

"That's lame!" Ruffnut shouted. "You should come with us, have some fun!"

Glancing over her shoulder, Merida said, "Actually I was hoping to see you. I'd sort of like someone to teach me how to fly a

dragon."

"You came to the right place!" Tuffnut declared. "We're the best teachers you could ask for!" He stepped past Merida and into the shop. "Gobber we're taking Merida!" he shouted. He grabbed the Scot by her arm and dragged her towards the Zippleback. "Come on, you can ride with me!"

Ruffnut intercepted them. "Not a chance, idiot." She swung up onto Barf's neck and held her hand out for Merida. "Let's go!"

As they flew off over the forest, a shout sounded from behind them, "Guys, wait up!" Fishlegs and Meatlug flew up on Merida and Ruffnut's side. "Where are you- Oh, hi, Merida!"

"Hello!" She lifted one of her hands from Ruffnut's shoulder to wave.

"Get lost, Fishlegs!" Tuffnut shouted. "We're going to teach her how to fly, we don't need you around messing things up."

Frowning, Fishlegs said, "But shouldn't she learn how to fly solo? It's not like she'll have someone to ride a Zippleback with."

The twins were going to object and start insulting the boy again, but Merida cut in, "He has a point. Maybe you could all work together?" She looked pleadingly at her companions.

"Fine," Ruffnut grumbled and Fishlegs cheered quietly.

The two dragons touched down in a clearing in the trees. Ruffnut dismounted and let her brother fly Barf and Belch with Merida sitting by herself. It was quite a different experience from flying with someone else, even when Hiccup had put her in control. Mostly she just held on as tight as possible and tried not to panic. The Zippleback was much less well behaved than Toothless, and Barf's long, snake-like neck nearly slithered her off on several occasions. Eventually, they landed again. The dragon-riders urged Merida onto Meatlug's back. The slow-moving, docile Gronckle was a good starter dragon for the princess to learn on.

Merida cautiously guided Meatlug in slow circles around the clearing while the twins and Fishlegs yelled instructions at her. She tuned them out and focused on the task of flying. In her head she ran through the differences between flying a dragon and riding Angus. Flying was much less stable, but giving the directions was essentially the same, with the added difficulty of up and down. But all in all, most of the basic skills held over, so she worked on adapting and applying them.

"Let's try for a little more speed, shall we, beastie?" Merida whispered to the dragon. Meatlug gave her a dubious look, but her tiny wings flapped faster. There was a burst of speed, and the onlookers cried out in alarm.

"Meatlug, slow down!" Fishlegs shouted.

Merida leaned forward over the Gronckle's head. "Don't listen to him. Let's have some fun!" She pulled up and they climbed above the tree line.

"Your spaz dragon is going to kill Hiccup's girlfriend!" Tuffnut snapped. He and his sister made for their own dragon to go and "save" Merida.

"FiancÃ©," Fishlegs corrected timidly.

Glancing over her shoulder, Merida saw the twins starting after her. "Faster," she urged Meatlug. "I can handle it, let's go!"

Higher and faster they climbed. After a distance, Merida wrenched the reins around sending them into a dive. She could feel panic at the base of her skull, but squashed it down. Now was not the time! She and the twins hurtled past each other. One of them screamed her name, but she couldn't tell who. The wind was whistling in her ears, her hair was flying behind her. This was like riding a horse but (please forgive her, Angus) better!

"Alright, that's enough!" Merida and Meatlug pulled out of their dive. The princess raised her arms above her head and whooped in delight. She yanked a hand through her tangled curls and looked up towards Ruff and Tuff, who were peering down at her. She smirked and saluted smugly. Nobody rescued her. She could handle herself.

And in that moment, a blue blur shot by inches away from Meatlug's nose, startling the dragon backwards. Merida, who hadn't been holding on, was pitched backwards and into the open air. She screamed as she fell, but all she could think was, Whoever has to tell Hiccup I'm dead will be joining me in the afterlife.

Then, she was bent backwards over something completely solid. She groaned and rolled over onto her stomach. Meatlug was what had got her. She patted the dragon on the head and hauled herself back into a sitting position. "Thanks, beastie. Should've brought my harness with me. Wasn't thinking."

"What're you doing?" Fishlegs shrieked from the ground. Merida was going to respond when she realized he wasn't speaking to her.

"Sorry, I thought she was you." Stormfly hovered a few yards above Merida's head, Astrid reclining on the dragon's back.

Still hunched over from her aching back, Merida scowled. "I look nothing like him!" she shouted, lifting a strand of her hair.

Astrid shrugged. "Sorry, just saw a Gronckle. Fishlegs would've handled that situation much better."

With a huff, Merida carefully brought Meatlug back to the ground. Fishlegs offered his hand to help her down but she leapt off herself. The twins followed suit, as well as Astrid.

"I was looking for you guys," Astrid said. She flipped her braid over her shoulder as she gracefully dismounted. "Also avoiding Snotlout, but looking for you."

The five of them stood in a circle with the three dragons ringed around them. As the teens conversed, the dragons became gradually

tenser. Fishlegs noticed first, seeing Stormfly's readied tail over Astrid's shoulder. "Something's wrong with Stormfly," he said worriedly.

As Astrid moved to tend to her dragon, the other riders noted the unease of their own companions. They hurried off to see what was the matter, leaving Merida alone in the center. Because she didn't have a dragon to look after, she was the first to spot the dark, vaguely human-shaped movement in the shadows of the trees.

First instinct was to reach for her bow, which had been "unfortunately" left behind in Hiccup's house. Since she didn't know what else to do, she said, "Did anyone else see that?" and raised her hand to point at what she'd seen.

Astrid looked first. She, too, saw what Merida had seen and drew her ax from Stormfly's saddle. "Who's there?" she shouted. The other teens spun, drawing their own weapons.

The moving shadows multiplied, and Merida snatched up the biggest rock she could find close to her. She really wished she had her bow.

Out of the forest emerged a herd of unfamiliar Vikings. The figure Merida had seen first revealed itself to be a hulking man with a matted black beard and spiked armor.

"Alvin," Astrid growled.

"Hello again," the man replied. "We've come to congratulate the Dragon Conqueror, but he doesn't seem to be around. However, I suppose this must be the bride to be." He extended one enormous hand to Merida. "It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance, princess."

Astrid stood closest to Alvin, Stormfly at her side. Merida took a few steps forward as well. "How do you know who I am?" she questioned. Astrid glared at her but she shot a look right back. Out of the corner of her eye she noticed Fishlegs beckoning her over so they could make a quick escape on dragon back if need be. Merida ignored him.

Alvin shrugged casually. "I have my sources."

Merida and Astrid stood side by side, the Viking with her giant ax and the Scot clutching her rock. "What do you want and how quickly can I get you off my island?"

"Oh, I just came to pick up a few things." The outcast sneered. "Boys!"

Astrid leapt for Stormfly, grabbing Merida's wrist and yanking her along. Before they could climb on the Deadly Nadder's back, a net was thrown over her. Astrid pulled a knife and began sawing at the ropes, releasing Merida's wrist to do so. As she knelt, Merida was yanked backwards by her hair.

"Hey!" The princess screamed. She tried to turn around and swing out with her rock, but just got a face full of her own curls. A slender hand grabbed her shoulder and whirled back to face the way she had

been. She caught a glimpse of Astrid as the girl ducked around her. Merida was still straining against the grip on her hair, and then suddenly she was free and stumbling forward. Her head felt much lighter than it should be. She turned to see Astrid whacking a large man with the flat side of her ax. A large man who had a wad of red hair clutched in his hand.

Before she could completely process what had just happened, Merida was being seized again, this time around the waist. Her captor's hold granted her enough freedom to nail him in the side of the head with her rock. She dropped back to her feet and started running to see what she could do to help Stormfly, but something slammed into the back of her. She hurtled towards the ground, but was unable to get her hands under her in time. Merida's head impacted with the dirt and the world went dark.

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Alvin beamed as he knocked Astrid backward into the princess. The redhead hit her head on the ground and was knocked unconscious. The blonde leapt to her feet again and tried to haul the other girl with her, but the princess' limp body was hard to lift. Around them, the other Outcasts were battling the teens and their dragons.

"Let them all live," Alvin called to his men. "We need someone to deliver our message to the Dragon Conqueror. But give us some time to escape."

The twins and Fishlegs went down and their dragons were easily tranquilized. Still the leader loomed over Astrid, who stood in front of the princess. She was outnumbered, had no backup, and had three fallen friends, three dragons, and a friend's fiancÃ© to protect. Her hands shifted on the handle of her weapon as she tried to think of a scenario that ended with her winning.

There didn't seem to be one.

"We'll take this one, too," Alvin said. "She might be of some use."

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Snotlout had been looking for Astrid for the better part of an hour. She'd ditched him in town and he'd been searching the usual hiding places ever since. He was grumbling to himself as he flew over the forest. At this point, he'd be satisfied to find _anyone _as long as he wasn't flying around miserable anymore.

Below him was a clearing in the trees, and laying in the grass were Tuffnut, Ruffnut, Fishlegs, Meatlug, Barf and Belch, and Stormfly. Astrid was nowhere to be seen. Even so, Hookfang came down in the clearing.

As they landed, Snotlout saw the tranquilizer darts stuck in the dragons' necks. His friends were all lying unconscious. Stormfly was trapped in a net. Astrid's ax laid abandoned. And a few feet away, was a mess of severed red curls.

"Dear gods," Snotlout sighed. "Hiccup is going to lose it."

* * *

><p>Ayo people, guess who's still not dead? Hard to believe, I know. I'm really sorry. There's absolutely no excuse and I hope you can forgive me.**

I saw HTTYD2 twice last week. The second time was mostly spent thinking about where this story is going. And sobbing uncontrollably. But mostly thinking. So ANYWAY, I've decided (based on recent developments) this story in this universe is between HTTYD 1 and 2. The second movie would take place in two years. Everything would happen exactly the same plot wise, 'cept Hic and Mer would be married. In case you care.

So, thank you for not giving up on me after all of this torture.

PS- If you want to flip over HTTYD2 and would like to PM me, please feel free.

8. Chapter 8

Dragon related problems popped up every day on the island of Berk. Some of them were easily solved, some less so, but a good majority of them required Hiccup's attention.

The matter he'd been called in for that morning turned out to be more of an issue for the chief with some dragon things for him to deal with for a bit. But it was crawling on towards lunch and there wasn't really much left for Hiccup to do. Yet there he stood, leaning against a building and watching his father. He'd taken to twirling his bear pendant around and around on its cord just for something to do. He was attempting to see how fast he could get it going before it slipped off his finger.

It wasn't very fast.

As Hiccup bent to retrieve the fallen necklace yet again, Toothless' nose bumped his hip, nearly toppling him over. He staggered back upright and turned to his dragon. Toothless was nodding his head off to the side, where Stormfly was standing. The Deadly Nadder was tense, and her unease seemed to be seeping into Toothless as well. Both dragons were tightly wound, their muscles tense under their scales.

"Hey, Stormfly," Hiccup said soothingly, stroking the dragon's horn. "What's the matter, girl? Where's Astrid?" He looked around for her, but Astrid was nowhere he could see.

Stormfly nudged Hiccup back towards his own dragon. Toothless tilted his back towards Hiccup and flicked his tail, the mechanical fin clacking. The dragons tag teamed, bumping and directing Hiccup until he climbed onto Toothless' back.

"Alright, alright," he grumbled as he clipped himself in. "Hey, Dad!" he shouted. Stoick turned to look at him. "I'll be right back, okay? I think these two want something."

The chief's bushy eyebrows pulled together when he saw rider-less

Stormfly at his son's side. "Where's Astrid?"

Hiccup shrugged. "Dunno. Back in a bit!" He clicked the tailfin into position and Toothless took off like a shot, Stormfly hot on his tail.

The Night Fury let Stormfly overtake him, and the Nadder led them over the forest. They slowed and began to descend, and Toothless' nostrils and ears twitched. His muscles coiled even tighter. Something was very wrong.

The two dragons landed in a clearing and Snotlout leapt up from where he'd been bent over something. Hiccup slid off of Toothless' back, looking around him at two unconscious dragons. Tuffnut and Fishlegs were sprawled in the grass on opposite sides of the clearing. Ruffnut was behind Snotlout where he'd propped her against Barf's neck. Hookfang was gently nosing at Meatlug, trying to wake her.

"What happened?" Hiccup questioned. "Where's Astrid?"

"I don't know," Snotlout admitted. "I was looking for her and I found them like this. Stormfly was all tied up and I cut her loose to go get you. But, Hic-"

His sentence was cut off as Toothless whined loudly from behind Hiccup. The boy whirled to look at his dragon. Toothless looked at him with sad eyes and bent his head to nose at something on the ground.

"What is it, bud?" Hiccup asked, approaching.

Snotlout grabbed his arm to hold him back, "Hiccup, just let me-"

"Just a sec, Snotlout." Hiccup yanked his arm away. He stood at Toothless' side, running his hand over the dragon's shoulder. "What did you find, Toothless?"

The dragon's big black head lifted to reveal a mound of curly red hair.

Hiccup's mind ground to a halt as he stared at the hair. His hands clenched into fists and he dropped to his knees. Gingerly, he lifted a handful of the hair and as it slipped between his quivering fingers, there was no doubt in his mind. "Merida," he gasped. Toothless whined pitifully in agreement.

The world snapped back into action. "Where is she?" Hiccup roared, turning on Snotlout. "She was supposed to be with Gobber, what was she doing out here?"

Snotlout raised his hands to ward off his cousin's fury. "I'm telling you I don't know. Everything here was like this when I showed up, I only moved Ruffnut and freed Stormfly."

"Well obviously something happened!" Hiccup paced back towards the hair. "Someone took her! Who was it?"

There was no possible way to get that answer with the others still unconscious. For lack of a better idea, the cousins hauled Figlegs

and Tuffnut onto Stormfly's back and tied them on with what was left of the net. Hiccup draped Ruffnut over Toothless' neck in front of the saddle and held on to her. Snotlout stayed in the clearing to look after Meatlug and Barf and Belch until they woke up. Toothless and Stormfly made for the village while Hiccup rode with his mind whirling in worried circles.

The second Stormfly touched down with the two unconscious teenagers secured to her back, they were swarmed by intrigued villagers. Someone untied the ropes and carried the two boys to get help. Hiccup jumped down and handed Ruffnut off to the first person who offered their arms. He spun wildly, still hoping to see Merida running through the crowd towards him. Maybe she'd escaped and made it back to town.

But she was nowhere to be found, and it didn't surprise Hiccup. She never would have abandoned three people to handle whatever had happened back there in the forest. Even unarmed and in an unfamiliar place, Merida would never back away from a fight. Something had happened to her.

Gobber came lumbering towards him. "Hiccup!" he called. "What's going on?"

"Snotlout-" Hiccup stuttered, stopped, and cleared his throat. "In the forest, he found them. Merida's here. Her hair. She's gone. Something someone took her."

oOoOoOoOoOoOo

Gobber shouted for someone to go and get the chief and guided Hiccup off after the people who were carrying the boy's friends. Toothless and Stormfly followed dutifully behind.

Hiccup paced the floor as a healer looked over his friends. After inspecting the bruises on all of their foreheads, the woman walked up to Hiccup wringing her hands.

"All of them received violent blows to the head. They'll be fine when they wake up, they've all had worse." The healer rolled her eyes, then recomposed her serious expression. "But they might not wake up for a while."

"Well wake them up!" Hiccup pleaded. "They're the only ones who know what happened." He made to grab Fishlegs' shoulder and shake him.

The healer restrained Hiccup. "That won't do any good! If we wake them up before they're ready, they'll just be scrambled. And even then, they might not remember what happened."

Hiccup groaned. "They have to know!"

"Hiccup!" Stoick boomed. Thornado landed outside and he jumped off, grabbing his son by the shoulder. "Son, what's happened?"

"Some sort of attack," Hiccup said. "Snotlout found these three in the forest. Stormfly was tied up but he sent her after me. I went and saw. Whoever it was, they took Merida, Dad."

"Musta taken Astrid, too. Stormlfly's just wandering around all by herself," Gobber pointed out.

Stoick cursed and rubbed his hand over his eyes. "Son, I'm sorry. We'll find them."

Squaring his shoulders, Hiccup marched past his father. "Of course I will. I'm going to go search the forest now. Keep a look out for Snotlout and the other dragons, and send someone for me when one of these three wakes up."

"Son," Stoick said worriedly.

"I can't just stand here, Dad!" he shouted. "Someone took Merida. I don't know who, and I don't know where to, and I won't know because these are the only people who can tell me! But someone took her, and they might be somewhere on the island. I have to go, Dad. I have to look for Merida." Father and son stared each other down, Hiccup's chin raised defiantly in Stoick's pitying gaze. Finally, the chief nodded and the dragon trainer relaxed just a bit. "Alright then," Hiccup sighed, and with that he was gone, shouting, "Let's go, bud!" over his shoulder.

oOoOoOoOoOoOo

Toothless flew low and slow over the trees of Berk. Some of the taller branches dragged along his belly, but he ignored them, instead concentrating on counterbalancing his precariously perched rider.

Hiccup was leaned out far over Toothless' left side. His right hand had a white knuckle grip on the opposite side of the saddle. He peered through the thick canopy, scouring the ground for any sign of his lost fiancée. Toothless was simply trying to keep the frantic boy from falling off.

"Merida!" Hiccup shouted over the treetops. "Merida!"

When he noticed that Hiccup's fingers starting to quiver, Toothless rolled slightly so that the boy was forced back into the saddle. Hiccup flopped forward onto the beast's neck and covered his head with his arms. "We've gotta find her, Toothless," he moaned miserably. Toothless whined sympathetically and tried to look up at his companion and offer some comfort. After a moment, Hiccup ruffled his hair and sat up. "Take me back where Snotlout found them. Maybe there's something else there." He patted Toothless' neck as they turned in the right direction.

Snotlout and the dragons were gone when they arrived. "That's a good sign, right, bud?" Hiccup sighed. "Maybe the others will wake up soon." He slid out of the saddle and stood in the center of the clearing, slowly turning to see if there were any hints as to who had taken Merida. He froze when his eyes fell on her hair, cringing at the sight of it. The wind had scattered the curly locks a bit. He made his slow, painful way over to where the biggest pile was and knelt next to it.

It felt wrong to leave it just laying there, disrespectful somehow. "But what am I going to do with it?" Hiccup whispered to himself. Toothless approached cautiously and bent his head. When Hiccup didn't

object, he pressed his nose into the hair, taking in Merida's scent so he wouldn't forget it. He might have to track her later and he didn't want to fail his best friend. Besides, the dragon quite liked the Scottish princess. She was spunky.

Carefully, Hiccup picked a longish lock of hair from the mess. He twisted it around his ring finger for the moment and yanked his pendant from under his suit. Taking it off, he stretched the cord between two fingers to find the spot exact opposite from the knot and tied the lock of hair right there. The bear slid down the cord and bumped against the double knot of hair as Hiccup put the necklace back on and tucked it away again.

"Don't you worry, Mer. I'm trying."

oOoOoOoOoOoOo

Stoick the Vast, feared and respected chief of the island of Berk, stood quietly against the wall of the healer's hut, waiting on orders from his 17 year-old son. The three teenagers across the room from him remained unconscious as the healer draped cool rags over their bruises. Stoick would not move until one of those teenagers woke and told him what had become of his future daughter in law (and Astrid, he had to keep reminding himself), because no one would be telling Hiccup but him. He was the only one who stood a chance of making the boy stay long enough to come up with a plan once he knew. Whoever it was had overpowered four armed Vikings, a spitfire Scottish princess, and three dragons. They did not need Hiccup plunging in head-on and alone.

Gobber reentered the room and stood beside his friend. "No sign of him or Snotlout yet. Anything from these three?"

"No," Stoick sighed. "I hoped that this wouldn't happen to my boy, that he could have a happy life. Especially after things changed with the dragons! I had hope, Gobber, hope that he wouldn't lose his love, lose Merida, like I lost Valka."

"Well the girl wasn't taken by a dragon," Gobber countered. "Astrid would have been able to wrangle any beast. Whoever it was, we'll find 'em and get her back. You know Hiccup, he won't give up until he's got her."

With a groan, Stoick shook his head. "You're right," he agreed. "We just need to know who we're looking for." He folded his arms and glared at the unconscious teens as if he could wake them by sheer force of will.

"And in the meantime," Gobber chuckled, "She and Astrid are probably already working on an escape plan."

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Merida returned to consciousness with a throbbing headache. "Okay, well _that _hurts," she grumbled. She lifted one hand to find that there was a shackle around her wrist. "Oh, lovely." She dragged the chain with her as she rubbed her head. There wasn't nearly as much hair to get through as usual. "Ah, yeah, I suppose that happened, too. Perfect."

Opening her eyes revealed a high ceilinged stone cell. It was dimly lit, and the sounds of chaos echoed from down the hall. Astrid was slumped in the corner, still out cold. The Viking girl was similarly shackled, her wrist attached to the other end of Merida's chain, which ran through a loop in the center of the back wall. The bars of the cell were wide metal posts with randomly placed slanting crosspieces. The right and left walls were open to cells on either side and barred in the same manner. Merida figured she could maybe fit through, though it would be a tight squeeze. That's probably why they were chained to the wall.

"Well, this is great," Merida said. "Dad's going to kill Hiccup, and then where'll I be? Not that I know where I am, anyway."

"Would you stop talking to yourself?" Astrid moaned, sitting up. "We don't want to let the Outcasts know we're awake. Alvin will just start a monologue."

"Outcasts?" Merida whispered.

"Vikings banished from their tribes for various reasons. Some wise guy decided to send all the worst criminals to the same place," Astrid explained. "They have more trouble with dragons than we ever did. They want to train them but can't figure it out, so they keep trying to get Hiccup, but we don't really need a bunch of conniving lowlifes to be airborne. We've had troubles with them before. Lots of times." Rising unsteadily, she moved out to the bars to look around, forcing Merida to go closer to the wall. Astrid's arm stretched as far as possible so she could lean out. "They've got us in a back hall. Only a few dragons around here."

"So they're using us for ransom, to get Hiccup to help them," Merida said.

"You're here for ransom," Astrid corrected. "They're probably hoping that I can train their dragons."

Neither girl said anything after that. Astrid gradually made her way over to where Merida stood against the wall and leaned next to her.

"You cut my hair off," Merida said quietly, not looking at the other girl.

"Freed you, didn't I."

"Momentarily," Merida shrugged. "Thanks, anyway."

"Whatever."

Astrid sank to the ground and stared at the empty cell across from them, while Merida took advantage of the extra chain and began pacing. Over the quiet rattling of the chain on the stone floor, there was the constant drone of noise from down the hall.

She tried to come up with a plan to get them out, truly she did, but Merida kept getting distracted by the lightness of her head. Her freshly shorn curls were cut so close to her head that it was a wonder Astrid hadn't killed her. The pieces right on the edges of her

face that hadn't been in the Outcast's grip were still full length, but the great majority of it had been cut short. Her hair stuck out in all directions without its former weight to hold it down. It was something she hadn't experienced in longer than she could remember, and therefore was demanding her attention.

Suddenly the commotion in the distance increased in volume. Merida was drawn to the bars, trying to see what it was, but Astrid grabbed the chain and yanked, reeling the Scot to the shadows of the cell. "Get in the corner!" Astrid hissed. "And keep quiet!" The girls retreated to opposite sides of the cell, the chain stretched between them, as long shadows appeared on the corridor walls.

A crowd of Outcasts pushed and pulled an enormous cart towards the cell adjacent to Merida's corner. They were transporting a massive dragon with shimmering white scales. It was the shape of a Monstrous Nightmare, only much larger, its head and snout were narrower, and its horns weren't curled. It struggled against its restraints, but was bound too tightly to accomplish much of anything. Inside the cell, the Outcasts unstrapped one foot at a time before securing it to the floor. As soon as they were sure the dragon was secure they beat a hasty retreat, never once acknowledging the two girls in the next cell.

Merida's eyes widened as she watched the beast. "What sort of dragon is that?"

Astrid shook her head. "I have no idea."

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"Don't you worry, Mer. I'm trying."

As Toothless bowed his head to make it easier for Hiccup to mount, a shadow fell over them. The dragon trainer looked up to see Thornado descending upon them. Immediately after landing, Stoick dismounted and stood before his son, eyes cast to the ground.

"Tuffnut was the first to wake up," the chief said in as quiet a voice as possible. "We didn't even have to ask him, he woke up shouting it." Stoick raised his gaze to meet his Hiccup's nervous eyes. He set his jaw and stood tall. "It was the Outcasts. They came from the forest, an ambush. Your friends, they were outnumbered, never stood a chance."

Hiccup's face hardened and he turned back towards Toothless, who also wore a determined look. "They're using her as ransom," Hiccup growled. "And Astrid is there as a stand-in until I give them what they want. Well, it won't work. I'm getting Meri â€" them â€" back and taking the Outcasts down." Leaping onto Toothless' back, he looked at his father. "I'm going, Dad. The longer I wait, the longer Alvin has to prepare to fight me."

Stoick's enormous hand wrapped around his boy's leg. "Come back to the village son, just to get some help. Your friends'll want to come along, and you stand a better chance with back up."

The man had a point, however reluctant Hiccup was to admit it. He sighed in defeat and said, "Fine, but let's move quickly."

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"We're coming."

This was what Snotlout declared the when Hiccup approached them in the village. Ruffnut, Tuffnut, and Fishlegs were lined up with him, their dragons recovered and standing behind.

"You know you don't have to," Hiccup said as a formality.

"But we want to," Ruffnut countered. "We've been _dying _for some action around her. Now's the time!"

"Yeah, man," Tuffnut concurred. "You couldn't stop us if you tried."

Hiccup nodded, said, "Great," and turned to face his father. "Someone needs to tell Merida's family. We need to send a messenger."

"I'll go," Gobber volunteered.

"Great, thank you," Hiccup said. "Take Stormfly, though. She's fast and without Astrid, she needs a rider anyway. You should get going right away, it's a long flight."

Gobber saluted and ran off.

"What else, Hiccup?" Stoick asked. "Tell us what you need."

"I need to get going," Hiccup insisted. "Come on."

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The dragon kept its enormous, muzzled head turned away from the girls next door. Merida and Astrid had both made their way over to that side of their own cell. They watched the beast silently, standing side by side with their arms stretched behind them.

"No idea, then?" Merida whispered, not wanting to attract the dragon's attention. "Really?"

"I'm sorry that I haven't memorized every single type of dragon!"

Merida rolled her eyes and muttered, "Maybe you're not as much use as these Outcasts seem to think."

Astrid whirled and slammed Merida against the cell wall, her forearm pressed across the princess' shoulders. "Let's get one thing straight," she hissed. "You don't have the right to talk about me, got it? So just shut up." She released the other girl and stomped over to sit next to the chain ring.

Rubbing her shoulders, Merida scowled at the Viking girl. Then, she grabbed the chain in her bound hand and dragged it with her as she walked to stand before the bars of the dragon's cell.

The chain clanking on the ground drew Astrid's eyes to look at the

redhead. She watched in shock as Merida stood facing the creature next to them, and it turned its head just a bit to peer at her. "What are you doing?" Astrid sighed.

"Just looking," Merida snapped. "Now hush." She crossed her arms over her chest despite the cumbersome chain and waited for the dragon to do something.

And do something it did. The massive white head lifted on its serpentine neck and swiveled to face Merida head on. A dragon's typical yellow eyes were unsettling set among pure white scales, and they were focused solely on Merida. The dragon stretched its head toward her to get a closer look, never once blinking. Once it had found an acceptable view point, it held perfectly still, and the two of them watched each other closely.

Merida's fingers twitched on her arm. Tentatively, she lifted her free hand. The dragon's sharp eyes picked up on the slight movement and narrowed into slits.

Astrid voice raised above a whisper. "Don't!"

Undeterred, Merida continued to reach out. She stepped right up to the bars and reached through. Her hand hovered just on the other side and the dragon pulled back. They both held completely still for a few long minutes, each waiting for the other to make a move. Finally, Merida leaned farther into the other cell. The mysterious beast let out a low growl that sent her stumbling backwards. Once Merida was all the way back in her own cell, it turned away from her once more, settling its head on the other side of its body.

As Merida continued to stare at the dragon, Astrid snickered and said, "You're lucky that thing is muzzled. You would've just gotten fried if it was free."

"If it was free, I wouldn't have done, that," Merida insisted. "I'm not stupid. Just curious."

Astrid shrugged. "I beg to differ. Either way, curiosity killed that cat."

"If Hiccup hadn't been curious, you never would have learned how to train dragons."

"Hiccup's missing a leg."

"He's got nine lives."

"If he hadn't tamed a dragon, I wouldn't be stuck here with you."

Merida sighed and plopped down right next to the dragon's bars. "I'm not much happier about it than you are. Trust me."

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Martin did not sign up for this kind of torture. He was hoping for an easy job guarding the gates of the castle. Honestly, who would ever be dumb enough to attack clan Dun'Broch? He did a lot of sleeping on

the job, but nothing bad had ever happened. Unfortunately, that made him an extremely easy target for the boy princes and their trouble making. He barely had a mustache left to speak of. He'd learned to sleep with one eye open.

He wasn't very good at it. Poor Martin was drawn from his slumber by a gruff voice saying, "I need to speak to the king or queen."

With a yawn, Martin managed to force his eyes open and was greeted by the horned nose of a scaly blue dragon. He shrieked in a very unmanly way and tumbled off his stool, nearly decapitating himself with his own ax.

"Message from Berk," the burly man riding the dragon said. "Kind of important, really. It's about the princess."

End
file.